THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF

EARLY MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE

EDITED BY
CLARE A. LEES

Informed by multicultural, multidisciplinary perspectives, *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature* offers a new exploration of the earliest writing in Britain and Ireland, from the end of the Roman Empire to the mid-twelfth century. Beginning with an account of writing itself, as well as of scripts and manuscript art, subsequent chapters examine the earliest texts from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and the tremendous breadth of Anglo-Latin literature. Chapters on English learning and literature in the ninth century and the later formation of English poetry and prose also convey the profound cultural confidence of the period. Providing a discussion of essential texts, including *Beowulf* and the writings of Bede, this *History* captures the sheer inventiveness and vitality of early medieval literary culture through topics as diverse as the literature of English law, liturgical and devotional writing, the workings of science and the history of women's writing.

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Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

ACMRS	Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies
ANS	*Anglo-Norman Studies*
ASE	*Anglo-Saxon England*
ASPR	Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, ed. Krapp and Dobbie
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
ChLA	*Chartae Latinae antiquiores*, ed. Bruckner and Marichal
CLA	E. A. Lowe (ed.), *Codices latini antiquiores*
CMCS	*Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* (later *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*)
CSASE	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
DOE	*Dictionary of Old English* (University of Toronto)
EEMF	Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile
EETS	Early English Text Society
EHR	*English Historical Review*
ELN	*English Language Notes*
EME	*Early Medieval Europe*
ES	*English Studies*
HBS	Henry Bradshaw Society
HE	Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors
HEL	Hofmann, *Nordisch-englische Lehnbeziehungen*
ÍF	*Íslenzk Fornrit*
JEGP	*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
JMH	*Journal of Medieval History*
JML	*Journal of Medieval Latin*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
L	Latin
MÆ	*Medium Ævum*
MP	*Modern Philology*
MS	*Mediaeval Studies*
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
N&Q	*Notes and Queries*
NM	*Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*
OE	Old English
OEN	*Old English Newsletter*

ON	Old Norse
PIMS	Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies
PL	Patrologia Latina, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1844–64)
PBA	*Proceedings of the British Academy*
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*
RB	*Revue bénédictine*
RES	*Review of English Studies*
Skj	*Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, ed. Jónsson
SN	*Studia Neophilologica*
SP	*Studies in Philology*
TPS	*Transactions of the Philological Society*
TRHS	*Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*

Introduction: literature in Britain and Ireland to 1150

CLARE A. LEES

Taking to sea

The Parker Manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 891 records that Dub Sláine, Mac Bethad and Máel Inmain crossed the Irish Sea in a rudderless boat, without sails and with little food. The three risk-takers did not care whether or not their food ran out or where their journey or pilgrimage 'for Godes lufan' took them, yet they landed in Cornwall and travelled on to the Anglo-Saxon court of King Alfred the Great. Immediately after this, the annal notes the death of the best teacher among the Scotti at that time, Suibhne (Swifneh in Old English).[1] These celebrated stories of three men in a boat and of the excellence of Irish scholarship are not without precedent in the history of early medieval travel and cultural exchange. In the seventh century, the scholar-poet Aldhelm, bishop of Malmesbury, who may himself have benefited from Irish training, describes the English as travelling to Ireland like swarms of bees to learn from its scholars. The Chronicle entry for 891 opens, however, with an update on the activities of the Viking forces on the continent and the battle at Louvain (now in modern Belgium) between the Vikings, the East Franks, the Saxons and the Bavarians. The cultural world of the Anglo-Saxons, the earliest people to call themselves English, was informed as much by its interests and relations with the continental kingdoms as with its neighbours.

In the history of English literature the entry for 891 in the Parker Chronicle (manuscript A of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle) is also noteworthy because it provides remarkable insight into how writing, as the technology of script and manuscript production, is a dimension of the broader conceptualization of history as written record in the early Middle Ages. Visible in the Chronicle entry is the moment when the second scribe of the manuscript takes over from the first and, with this transfer of hands, comes a new series of annals

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1 Bately (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS A*, pp. 54–5 (p. 54).

recording the final years of the reign of Alfred the Great. The evidence brings us close to the moment when the Chronicle was assembled in the late ninth or very early tenth century. The second scribe continues the reportage of events with an account of the sighting of a comet on or about the time of the liturgical season of Rogation, after Easter. The annal gives the Latin term for the comet ('cometa') but proffers too an English etymology for the long-tailed or haired star or 'feaxede steorra'.[2] Natural phenomena, wars with the Vikings, pilgrimage, knowledge and learning are of equal interest in this account of what was deemed memorable in one year in the ninth century. Informed by the tremendous surge of interest in English literature generated by Alfredian court culture more generally, the Parker Chronicle entry for 891 offers us a glimpse into the making of literary history.

It is because of its evidence for the writing and composition of the past as historical annal, its interest in pilgrimage as well as the nitty-gritty of Irish boat construction and travel, its terse account of the trajectory of Viking raids on the continent, its casual references to Irish, English and Latin learning, its recording of time by liturgical season as well as chronological year and its emphasis on the science of observed phenomena that the Parker Chronicle entry for 891 serves so well as an introduction to the multicultural, multidisciplinary, trans-temporal perspectives which inform *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*. Taking as its generous remit the earliest centuries of the medieval era up to and well beyond the traditional end of the period with the Norman Conquest in 1066, this volume brings together the literary histories of Britain and Ireland, the two islands of what is sometimes known as the Atlantic Archipelago, from the fifth and sixth centuries to the mid-twelfth century. Consonant with this revision of traditional chronologies and disciplines, *Early Medieval English Literature* is divided into three sections, each of which deals with such evidence as there is for the dating of textual production in the various literary cultures that make up the early medieval – some texts, *Beowulf* is a good example, are notoriously difficult to date – but also discusses the evidence thematically and interpretively. Part I, 'Word, script and image', begins with the history of writing itself in the earliest centuries, after which follow chapters on the early literary languages and cultures of the period in Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and on the powerful role of Latin literary culture in northern as well as southern England up to, roughly speaking, the end of the ninth century. Part II, 'Early English literature', explores the vernacular literature of the Anglo-Saxons, paying particular

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2 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

attention to its literary, linguistic and cultural relationships, illustrating just how various and expansive are the forms of textual production throughout the early medieval centuries. This section of the book moves forward from the ninth century but it is also alert to the necessarily different chronologies suggested, for example, by the genre of history writing or by women's history, much as the account of art and writing in Part I demands a broader and more flexible approach to period and date. Part III, 'Latin learning and the literary vernaculars', begins similarly, with discussions of science and law which are relevant to the whole of the early medieval period. Other chapters, however, address the rich literary cultures of, for example, later Latin, Gaelic, Welsh, English and Anglo-Scandinavian, and again move from 900 to, roughly speaking, 1150. Literary chronologies, this book suggests, are not uniform or readily mapped one onto another. Those suggested by an expansive eleventh century characterized by its European contexts, for example, need to be set against the more detailed particularities of literary production in English in the later years of the ninth and early tenth centuries. This book makes use of resonances of theme and literary culture in its response to the historical evidence for literary production, and thereby facilitates an understanding of the mobile currents of literary interest throughout the early medieval centuries. Its chapters, therefore, can be read sequentially in terms of chronology and date (from earlier to later), but they can also be grouped differently, with reference to place and region, or to thematic, cultural and literary import.

Indeed, this introduction takes up the annalist's themes for the year 891, using them to suggest a number of routes through the early medieval centuries other than those outlined by section and chapter titles. This flexibility to read across different chapters and sections can similarly deepen our insight into the early medieval multicultural literary world. Chapter 4, for example, addresses the earliest writings from Ireland, Scotland and Wales (granting that these regions map only very roughly onto medieval territories and regions) and Chapter 5 the tremendous breadth of Anglo-Latin literature to the end of the ninth century. Chapter 8 explores English learning and literature in the ninth century, a century very much identified with King Alfred, while Chapter 9, aware of the different traditions for writing history in Britain and Ireland, assesses its cultivation in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Chapter 17 examines the productive and often innovative relationship between what we now think of as Latin and English liturgical and devotional literature. Chapters 18 and 19, with their examination of the poetics of wonder, on the one hand, and the workings of time, the body and science, on the other, demonstrate the centrality of the perceptual world and the production of

knowledge in Latin and English literary and learned discourse. Chapter 23 brings together the evidence for Anglo-Scandinavian language and literature by focusing both on particular regions such as York and London and by examining contacts across the sea. The complex hybridities of later Latin literary styles are the subject of Chapter 21, and Chapters 24 to 26 trace European literature in the English eleventh century as well as later Gaelic and Welsh writings.

The ecclesiastical history of the English people, the *Historia ecclesiastica* written by the churchman and scholar Bede in the early eighth century, offers a slightly different entry into our understanding of literary history from that offered by the English Chronicle. Bede was assiduous in documenting wherever possible the development of English Christianity across the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and their contacts with other Christian communities in Hibernia and Britannia. His perspective, framed by an understanding of salvation history, is informed by the politics of his own Church and people, by Northumbrian deference to the metropolitan of Rome and by connections with influential ecclesiastical centres on the continent. Bede was capable of paying scant and occasionally slighting attention to neighbouring kingdoms in Britain and Ireland even as he recognized their profound importance. Chapter 7 notes, for example, that the famous account of the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in Britain, the *Adventus Saxonum*, which Bede takes over from the sixth-century British monk Gildas's *De excidio Britannia* [*The Ruin of Britain*], is reoriented to be more accommodating of Anglo-Saxon perspectives. Bede, of course, was fully aware of learned resources and repertoire of styles and genres offered by Latin literature, whether those produced in Britain, the English kingdoms, Ireland or on the continent, as Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate. He knew enough too to be alert to the importance of early English vernacular culture. The significance of the so-called first English poem, Cædmon's *Hymn*, is explored in further detail in Chapter 10, and the fuller range of the poetic corpus after Cædmon is charted in Chapter 11. Bede's knowledge of other literary languages in Britain and Ireland, however, could be less well informed. The range and linguistic virtuosity of literary production in Britain and Ireland conveyed by this book puts into focus the limits of even Bede's engagement with these other literary cultures, and it demonstrates just how varied is the story of early medieval literary history.

An understanding of literary production in the early Middle Ages, however, needs to take into account not merely where cultural engagement takes place but when and how it is situated. In this respect, some understanding of time, not merely in the sense of chronology, but of how medieval literature itself

understands time, is crucial. Dating early medieval texts is notoriously difficult and the chronologies of literary production can be surveyed only in the broadest terms. The literature itself, however, has a finely nuanced sense of past, present and future, finding ways to think about this world and its temporalities as well as to glimpse eternity in the next world. Put another way, taking to sea in order to capture something about the spirit ('for Godes lufan') was of interest to more than just three Irish travellers in the ninth century. Eorcengota, a member of the seventh-century Kentish royal family, for example, was one of several religious women who travelled to Francia to take advantage of the new Christian learning there. Such insights into the energy and dynamism that new knowledge generates can lead to different ways to think about the literary history of women's writing, as Chapter 14 points out. Chapter 15 explores further how, in the Lives of the holy, women and men, friendship and gender, as well as sexuality and sanctity, form the co-ordinates of a life worth narrating. Later in the eighth century, to take the case of another Anglo-Saxon abroad, Wynfrith, an English monk from Wessex, led a series of conversionary missions within the Frankish empire. As the saintly Boniface, Wynfrith later became known as the apostle of the Germans and their patron saint. He died in an attempt to convert the Frisians and left an extensive correspondence, with women as well as men, as another of his legacies, discussed in Chapter 5. The writing of the Life of Boniface, however, was left to another Anglo-Saxon at work on the continent, Willibald of Mainz. By contrast, the earliest known version of the Life of the sixth-century pope, Gregory the Great, who prompted the mission to convert the Kentish Anglo-Saxons in the first place according to Bede, and who was later known as the apostle of the English, was written in the north of England at Whitby (now in North Yorkshire), perhaps by a female member of the double monastery there. The Life of Gregory is a subtle reminder of the reach and ambition of the writing of hagiography in Northumbria, charted in greater detail in Chapter 6; the saintly Gregory, however, never came to Britain.

Small wonder, then, that so much early medieval literature is interested in ideas about home and abroad, travel and exile, places near and far, whether of this world or the next – poems like *The Wanderer* or *The Seafarer* (see Chapter 18), or works like *Immram Brain* [*The Voyage of Bran*] (Chapter 4), *The Wonders of the East* (Chapter 19) or Willibald's travels to the Holy Land as reported by the English nun Hugeburc of Heidenheim (Chapter 5). Knowledge of time itself and its workings in the world was big business, Chapter 19 points out. Early medieval scholars were much exercised by its calculation (whether in the form of the computus or in that of the measures of poetry) and by attempts

to describe and hence explore the natural, created world. The point is further underlined by Chapter 16's adoption of the Christian topos of the six ages of the world – a topos used by the ninth-century Cambro-Latin *Historia Brittonum* – to explore the great sequence of Old English religious poems of the Junius manuscript. Early medieval apprehensions of the shape of time are ways to understand its poetry as well as the Lives of its saints.

The exhilarating geography of peoples and places, the sheer vitality and interconnectedness, as well as difference and dissonance, of early medieval literary communities, together with their investment in this world and in the next, are central to early medieval literary history. Contemporary knowledge of the world forged by trade and travel is a dimension of much longer-standing inquiries into history made by late classical and medieval cultures. The intellectual frisson generated by the knowledge that the history of the world can be brought right up to date is palpable in, for example, the famous ninth-century report to the Alfredian court about the voyages in northern Scandinavia made by Ohthere, a Norwegian, and Wulfstan, who was possibly English or perhaps Frankish. In much the same way as the Irish pilgrims in the Parker Chronicle, these travellers too have made their mark on literary history, and the implications of their story are explored further in Chapters 7 and 10.

Anglo-Saxon contacts with the continent have been famously studied by Wilhelm Levison in his *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century*. As important for literary historians as for other historians, cultural exchange is just as significant for the tenth century as it is for the ninth as well as the eighth. The tenth century saw a determined (though not necessarily widespread or particularly successful) English effort to tidy up its ecclesiastical practices and monastic culture under the guiding spirit of the earlier reforms of the Carolingians. The so-called Benedictine Revival is coterminous with a period of West Saxon consolidation after the reconquest of the Anglo-Scandinavian territories early in the tenth century, and is complemented by new interests in Latin literature and in compositions associated with the liturgy and devotion, explored in Chapters 17 and 21. The second half of the century saw prolonged Scandinavian 'piracy' as the Anglo-Saxons tended to put it but also, as Chapter 23 stresses, Scandinavian poets at the court of Æthelred II. The period witnessed as well the production of virtually all the major manuscripts of English poetry, whose richness of genre, form and style is the subject of Chapter 11.

English literary culture is shot through with evidence of its international contacts and sources and this is an important aspect of its pre-eminence as a

literary language in the later tenth and eleventh centuries, a case argued vigorously by Chapter 22. The extent to which multilingualism and interlingualism as well as vernacular consolidation are central to periods of raiding, social disruption and warfare is evident too when we consider the cultural networks of the powerful elites, the ruling families, of the long eleventh century. Queen Edith, for example, wife of Edward the Confessor and patron of his *Life*, spoke English, French, Danish and Irish; she also had access to Latin, whether she read it herself or had it translated for her. The Confessor's court, like that of Cnut's earlier in the eleventh century, Chapter 24 points out, was international through and through. But this book demonstrates that internationalism was not a feature only of these later centuries, being rather a characteristic of the whole literary period.

Faced with such evidence, a history predicated on post-medieval ideas about national literary traditions, on the English literature of Anglo-Saxon England, for example, could achieve only so much. The Cambridge History of English Literature, and the volume in the series with which this volume is most closely associated, *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, edited by David Wallace, does not, however, commit us to such an account because the literary and linguistic culture of the English is not synonymous with its written vernacular. Some of Anglo-Saxon England's greatest literary achievements are written in Latin – Bede's work is the most obvious example, though that of Aldhelm's runs a close second – and, as we have already seen, the culture of the Anglo-Saxons is deeply connected to that of other early medieval kingdoms, near and far. Like *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, this volume attempts to include something of the many literary stories of the two islands of Britain and Ireland in this early period. Something, in other words, of the five languages and four nations or peoples that Bede described in the first chapter of the first book of his *Historia*: English, British, Irish, Pictish and Latin, the language of the universal Church (in so far as it was understood in the West).

Encountering the past

Chapter 25 draws our attention to a praise poem by Cinaed ua hArtacáin, chief poet of Ireland in the later tenth century, about the Scandinavian king of Dublin and the Hebrides, Amlaíb Cuarán or Óláfr Sigtryggsson, who had earlier been ruler of Scandinavian York. The ninth-century history of the Britons, *Historia Brittonum*, which was translated into Middle Irish or Gaelic in the eleventh century, notes that poetry apparently flourished at the court of

King Ida of Northumbria in the sixth century, naming the celebrated Welsh poets, Taliesin and Aneirin. Both are examples of the sustained reach of early medieval literature into its own past, whether that of living memory or of rehearsed, recited and sometimes recorded memory. The same tendency is evident in works as differently conceived as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle or, indeed, the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*: both demonstrate the importance of the historical imaginary in the earlier medieval period. The *Beowulf* manuscript can be dated, broadly speaking, to the very end of the tenth century or the very beginning of the early eleventh, yet the poem is set in the migration age of the fourth to the sixth centuries in an almost mythical Scandinavia – almost mythical because, as is well known, the poem maintains an uncanny relation to the physical geography and history of the region. Composed in Old English and copied by two English scribes (although scribal identity or ethnicity cannot be easily read off script, Chapter 2 reminds us), the poem makes no explicit reference at all to the Anglo-Saxons, or English as they were calling themselves by the later tenth century. Perhaps we should not be surprised that two of the poem's best translations in the twentieth century were made by Scottish and Irish poets well versed in the poetry of the north: Edwin Morgan and Seamus Heaney.

Remembering the poets and the ancestors is an aspect of a widespread cultural investment in exploring how the past might be anchored in the present. And the present can have a long reach too, as Chapter 12 stresses. *Beowulf* – the best-known Anglo-Saxon poem – continues to call on its readers, to challenge us with its intricate poetics that renders its cultural world immediate, present and implicated in our own. Chapter 13, on such celebrated shorter Old English poems as *The Wanderer*, assesses the temporal dimensions of experience central to a group of poems still known, somewhat nostalgically, as the Old English elegies. What a poem makes possible in terms of experience, what it perceives and knows, together with the responses it tries to elicit, is central also to Chapter 18's account of Old English riddles and the literature of wonder.

For Bede the story of the English in the two islands of Britannia and Hibernia began with Roman Britain, however, and with the legacy of history, not poetry. Anglo-Saxon scholars tend to date the early medieval English period from the arrival of the Germanic tribes of the Angles, Saxons and so-called Jutes in the middle of the fifth century or from the conversion of Kent at the end of the sixth – both events documented by Bede. The ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* associates the beginning of history with the Christian creation and so starts with Adam; it continues by ordering time according to

the six ages of the world – Adam to the Last Age, as noted earlier. But the *Historia Brittonum* also finds narrative space for the Trojan origins of the British and, of course, the story of Arthur, with which Chapter 26, on the literature of the Welsh, and this book ends. That the British are descended from Brutus and count Arthur as one of their heroes reminds us how mythmaking in the medieval period could gain authority by association with traditions of classical fictions. The same 'story-world', as Chapter 24 puts it, of the Romans and Greeks informed the history-making of the Gaels, as well as the English and the Normans in the later centuries of the early medieval period.

Using different mythologies from those of *Beowulf*, Welsh poets refined the art of revising past stories to fit present concerns to such an extent that it is virtually impossible to date their original composition: this is one of their greatest achievements, whose implications are carefully teased out in Chapter 26. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle too borrowed earlier traditions to structure its recording of the past, but the Parker Chronicle audaciously begins with the royal genealogy of the house of Alfred. In the ninth century, the West Saxons gave a big push to the recording of the annals of their history in English, as we have already seen, but the example of Æthelweard's Latin Chronicle demonstrates that English was not the only option for a family member of a European elite engaged on the project of history in the tenth. This Chronicle was commissioned by Matilda, abbess of Essen and Æthelweard's relative, who traced her family back to Alfred, while Æthelweard himself, ealdorman of the western provinces, was not only a member of the European elite but patron of the great English writer Ælfric (discussed further in Chapter 22). Genealogy, the history of a particular people, might be said to trump place, the history of a particular geography, in the Parker Chronicle as much as it does in Æthelweard's Chronicle though with significantly different results in literary language and style. The efficacies of genealogy could be put to powerful vernacular use: the Preface to the laws issued in the name of King Alfred is known as the Mosaic Preface, Chapter 20 reminds us, and recounts the laws which God gave to Moses.

Beginnings and endings

The interest of early medieval cultures in their own past, including that of its laws, is a point of convergence with the interest of modern culture in early medieval literature and history. The literary stories of the peoples and king-doms of the early medieval period are, however, as often incommensurate as they are complexly intertwined. Questions of when literary production in any

given tradition begins and ends are difficult to answer. Early medieval evidence for Welsh writing is very thin, though skilful interpretation of it indicates deep traditions of poetry-making and storytelling as well as of scholarly learning. Evidence for Scottish and Irish literary production makes better sense when the two are viewed together, given their close sociocultural and political relationships. English-language literature, like Anglo-Scandinavian literature, takes off in the ninth century, although the evidence of the laws starts early, but English literary production in Latin dates from the seventh century, well before Bede. A literary history that accounted only for one of these traditions would make it hard to detect and assess patterns of similarity, such as the sustained interest in classical literature in the later centuries in Ireland, Scotland and England, noted in Chapters 24 and 25. But patterns of difference and independence, indicated by choice of literary language, verse form, genre and style, are equally crucial in understanding how early medieval people negotiated their kinship and cultural practices. In this regard, poetry makes its own distinctions, marking it as belonging to the Welsh or the Anglo-Saxons, for example. Furthermore, as Chapter 1 stresses, literature in the early medieval centuries could be said to begin in an important sense with its technologies, with the resurfacing of writing and inscription in Ireland and Britain after the end of Roman Britain.

The matter of endings is even more, perhaps notoriously complex. There is considerable scholarly debate about the precise, historical nature of the relationship between Old English literature and early Middle English literature, for example, with some viewing the former as a vital cultural force in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and others seeing the latter as a new formation, foundational for the subsequent literary developments. What is clear, however, is that neither the literature of the English nor English literature ends with the Norman Conquest in 1066. The eleventh and twelfth centuries are crucial ones for Irish, English, Scandinavian and French international literary cultures. Evidence for Welsh could be said to belong neatly to the later centuries as well, if not to begin with them. By the same token, the long eleventh century acts as a precursor for the international literature of the French of England after it, and for continental developments such as the Loire School. The history of Latin literature reaches a tipping point when William of Malmesbury is able to reflect on its earlier traditions in the mid-twelfth century, by which time the production of classic Old English verse is well in the past and that of women's literary culture has shifted its dimensions and interest. Literary history in this book, therefore, looks forward from the end of Roman occupation of Britain to the mid-twelfth century, across the two

conquests of England in the eleventh century, which have traditionally and sometimes unhelpfully served as its end.

Latin and the written vernaculars

The earlier medieval centuries in Britain and Ireland can be characterized by the variety of their spoken and written vernaculars; by evidence for strategic deployment of bilingual as well as multilingual circuits of power and culture; by elite command of a dynamic, learned and changing Latinity; and by skilful, literary deployment of the resources of the past, whether in the form of late classical learning, of Christian salvation history or of vernacular traditions of story, invention and song. Evidence is uneven and often hard to come by, especially for the earliest centuries (those so-called 'dark ages'); Pictish culture is notorious in this regard. Furthermore, throughout the period as well as long after it, access to literacy and to learning, especially in Latin, was an elite practice for societies which otherwise transacted their daily lives and celebrated their cultures in speech, using the traditional arts of the spoken word.

It is in these centuries, nevertheless, that we see the emergence of writing as material practice and as a medium of record; tracing that emergence facilitates the identification of broad transnational cultural patterns in the early Middle Ages. Indeed, Chapters 1–3 identify first how technologies of writing and inscription are adapted and exploited by the earliest communities of Britain and Ireland after Rome as material ways to name, to identify and to remember. These centuries witness too the emergence of a powerful, visually rich manuscript culture and of a dominant form of script, learned by the English from the Irish (who probably had it from the British in the first place) and used for English-language texts long after Caroline minuscule had been adopted in the later centuries for everything else. So sophisticated is the command of script in the Northumbrian seventh century, for example, that a book such as the Codex Amiatinus looks like an Italian product, drawing on the traditions of Rome.

The need for books and the cultural energy and innovation generated by access to new ways to learn, to commemorate and to worship is demonstrated in Chapter 3, which concentrates on how the Anglo-Saxons in particular develop and exploit visual and verbal patterns in both textual and material culture. Writing, considered as a system and as a characteristic of culture in the earliest medieval centuries in Chapter 1, prompts an account of script and scribes throughout the period in Chapter 2, which in turn prompts a study of the relation between voice, image and object in Anglo-Saxon culture in

Chapter 3. These, together with the chapters on the earliest literature of Scotland, Ireland and Wales (Chapter 4), on Insular Latin (Chapter 5) and on Bede (Chapter 6), make up the first part of this book, 'Word, script and image', introducing the main strands of this literary period in which written culture was produced in different regions, in different styles and languages, yet can be braided together in patterns common to and influential in the various kingdoms of Ireland and Britain.

Central to medieval culture is a sustained, committed and stylistically varied use of Latin. Latin is the prestige language throughout the early medieval period and Latin texts offer a rich vein of accomplishment, innovation and education. Latin literature can be a vehicle for learned display as well as celebration, worship and education. Authors as influential as Bede and Aldhelm (whose work continued to be read throughout the early medieval period and later), as well as chroniclers, poets and hagiographers, write in Latin and draw on its literary traditions. The subtle interpenetration of Latin and English accounts for some of the other innovations of the period, beyond the immediately obvious textual traditions associated with the Church such as commentaries and exegesis. The genres of the epistle or letter, the riddle, devotional writing and even the romance (as is so evidently the case of the Latin story of Apollonius of Tyre and its English adaptation),[3] are best understood in terms of both Latin and vernacular literary traditions. We have already noted how, in the tenth century, Æthelweard put together his Chronicle in Latin rather than the English vernacular with which the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was more broadly associated. Latin too was the language of choice for the polemical *Encomium Emmae* (written for the Norman Emma, the royal wife first of the English King Æthelred II and then of the Danish King Cnut) as well as for the later Life of Edward the Confessor. We might see Asser's Latin Life of Alfred, the only biography of the period, in a similar light. Latin hagiography similarly afforded a major vehicle for the exploration of the lives of the saints throughout the period. Innovations evident in the Northumbrian Latin Lives of Cuthbert, Wilfred and Gregory as well as in Bede's work show just what could be achieved. The influence of Adomnán's Life of St Columba, can be detected in the first anonymous *Life of St Cuthbert*, associated with the monastic community of Lindisfarne, but so too can the 'new' continental hagiography, as Chapter 4 elaborates. In the later centuries, following the flourishing of vernacular hagiography, Latin assumes a new prominence in, for example, Goscelin of Canterbury's Lives of the earlier

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3 See Goolden (ed.), *Apollonius of Tyre*.

English saints. As these examples suggest and as Chapter 21 stresses, Latin literature is a profoundly interlingual as well as intralingual phenomenon in these centuries in spite of the fact that it was an acquired, learned language. For these very reasons, the period also witnesses the emergence of written vernaculars.

The early medieval vernaculars of Old English, Old Saxon, Old High German and Old Norse (the Germanic-based languages) were probably mutually intelligible to a lesser or greater extent, and cultural traffic in ideologies and in Anglo-Scandinavian literary culture can be tracked in and out of the Atlantic archipelago. Chapters 7 and 23 remind us that this is as evident in the Old English poems of *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Brunanburh* as it is in the Old Norse legendary material associated with Vǫlundr. It is worth noting too in this context that the early vernacular verse narrative of the Life of Christ, the Old Saxon *Heliand*, is preserved in an Anglo-Saxon manuscript. Anglo-Scandinavian communities included farmers as well as skalds or poets and entertainers, traders and interpreters as well as the more familiar clergy and warriors. Literary exchange and influence within and across the vibrant cultures of Welsh, Irish and Gaelic communities, in both the earlier and later centuries, is similarly and often exuberantly diverse.

Overall the period is characterized by striking social and cultural independence, by local and small-scale developments and by a sometimes resolute difference that interrupts any singular narrative of early medieval multilingualism and interculturalism. The enmeshing of poetry, land and law so characteristic of Gaelic culture in Ireland and Scotland, for example, has little equivalent in the English-speaking kingdoms, where there is an abundance of both law and poetry but few known poets or poet-clerics. There is no English praise poem about a cat to match that of Pangur Bán either (for which see Chapter 4), though the learned traditions of the *Physiologus* are evident in one of the best-known English anthologies of the period, the Exeter Book, in its poems about the whale, the panther and, perhaps, the partridge.

The decision whether or not to write in Latin or in a particular vernacular, therefore, is not a simple relationship between a dominant, elite and learned language and subordinated, emerging written vernaculars. One measure of the independence of the vernaculars might be had from the tradition of Irish and English law codes – the English, Chapter 20 points out, set their laws in English from very early in the period, even if they were codified and collected in later centuries. Another, more complicated picture emerges from the fact that at least some of the scholars associated with the promotion of translations into English from Latin in the ninth century were brought to

the West Saxon court from Wales and Mercia as well as from places on the continent such as St-Bertin. As Chapter 9 points out, learning in English in the Alfredian court is envisaged as a process that leads to learning in Latin as well. English emerges as a written vernacular because of its contacts with other early medieval cultures of writing, especially at highly charged moments of convergence between political and socio-cultural ambitions. One such convergence is the late ninth-century consolidation of West Saxon hegemony associated with the court of Alfred and its programme of English literacy. Another may be detected in Bede's Latin account of Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry, to take the case of Cædmon's *Hymn*, and a third example, by way of contrast, is offered by Asser's Latin Life of Alfred. Latinity may give Asser, the Welsh bishop influential at Alfred's court, an agency too little remarked upon in studies of a culture that seems otherwise to have prided itself on its promotion of English, Chapter 21 argues. More obviously combative is the example, discussed in Chapter 10, of a ninth-century English version of the Life of Guthlac, which goes out of its way to demonize the British-speaking communities who were displaced by the Mercian saint's occupation of their land. Conversion and conversation, engagement and translation do not rule out conflict and hostility, stereotyping and silencing.

The power that can accrue from writing in a vernacular is evident from the ninth century on but most particularly in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The tenth century saw the production of a series of remarkable anthologies of English poetry, described in Chapter 11, but so too the flourishing of writing in Irish. For one influential English stylist and prolific writer in the late tenth century mentioned earlier, Ælfric of Eynsham, translation from Latin into English is divine gift, evangelical opportunity and a way to build Christian learning. Chapter 22 charts the many domains in which English as a vernacular claimed authority, but this authority is negotiated by a culture in which writing in Latin is always an option. How the balance is weighed in these later centuries is open to interpretation. Assessing the evidence associated with the Benedictine Reform as well as with writers such Osbern and Goscelin, Chapter 21 argues that vernacular culture, itself hardly monological, interacts with, indeed produces different Latinities. The exercise of law and the evidence for scientific learning are also crucial factors in assessing the literary history of the early medieval period: both draw on Latin and vernacular traditions, though to a different extent. Part III, 'Latin learning and the literary vernaculars', therefore charts the flourishing of learned and literary traditions throughout the early medieval period, but with particular attention to the later centuries. Chapter 26, with its attention to Welsh writing, a

literature that, in reshaping the past, found its future recorded after the conventional end of the early medieval centuries, provides a fitting ending.

The literature of Anglo-Saxon England

The literature of the Anglo-Saxons can be productively understood via its engagement with Latin and with other cultural traditions of writing in Britain and Ireland. For this reason, Parts I and III of this book might be seen as contributions towards a fuller multilingual, multicultural literary history of the early Middle Ages. *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* offers something of a model in this regard because of its inclusion of chapters on, for example, Scottish and Welsh writing, but a closer analogue is offered by recent accounts of early medieval history. In the last decade or so, historians of the early medieval period have forged a new emphasis on European cultural history after Rome, to invoke one recent study by Julia M. H. Smith. The resultant histories have an impressively well-informed geographical breadth and temporal reach, though the gain in breadth can sometimes mean a sacrifice of historical depth and a loss of focus on the particularities of the early medieval written vernaculars and on Latinity as a learned literary resource. Literary scholars, therefore, have much to contribute. As Chapter 24 indicates, the call for a literary history of the European Middle Ages is a powerful one.

At the same time, however, there is a need for a clear-sighted focus on early English literature before 1150 within the particular context of the Cambridge History of English Literature, without which the literature of the English would begin with 'Old English and Its Afterlife', to cite the title of the first chapter of *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*. There are also broad arguments for a focus on the literature of Anglo-Saxon England because of its contribution to the history and study of English literature as well as its historical particularity as a written vernacular of significant size, ambition and literary cohesion. Part II of this book, 'Early English literature', therefore concentrates on the literature of the Anglo-Saxons within the context of the cultures and literary languages of this multicultural period. Chapter 7 explores how the Germanic world is central to this literary corpus, while Chapter 8 charts the emergence of English as a literary vernacular in the ninth century – a development so significant that it was often issued in the voice and name of a king. The confidence of Old English in expressing a range of voices and styles is mapped out in Chapter 10, while Chapter 11 offers a detailed account of Anglo-Saxon poetry, its forms and styles as well as its prosody. Historical

writing is the subject of Chapter 9. Taken together, these chapters, rich in themselves, also set the scene for detailed re-assessments of some of the best-known works in Old English – the shorter Old English poems, *Beowulf* and the literature of wisdom and riddles, women's writing, religious literary culture and hagiography – in Chapters 12–18.

Some early English literature is central to the modern literary imagination: not just a component of university courses and academic discourse, early medieval literature is an important resource for those who engage with cultural practices now, whether that engagement takes the form of translations, films and digital media, poetry or fiction, the visual or material arts – and not all of it is inspired by *Beowulf*. More of it deserves to be better known and not all of it is covered here. Nevertheless, for reasons of its own virtuosity as well as its continuing importance to later traditions, the literary history of the works produced by the Anglo-Saxons merits detailed consideration. That consideration, however, only increases the need to understand more fully the cultural dynamics of all the literary communities in early medieval Britain and Ireland. This book, inspired by travellers such as those Irish pilgrims in the ninth century and the adventurous Eorcongota in the seventh, offers a step on the journey to find out more.

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WORD, SCRIPT AND IMAGE

Chapter 1

Writing in Britain and Ireland, *c.* 400 to *c.* 800

JULIA M. H. SMITH

Haec in praesenti iuxta numerum librorum quibus lex diuina scripta est, quinque gentium linguis unam eandemque summae ueritatis et uerae sublimitatis scientiam scrutatur et confitetur, Anglorum uidelicet Brettonum Scottorum Pictorum et Latinorum, quae meditatione scripturarum ceteris omnibus est facta communis.

(*HE*, 1.1)

[At the present time, there are five languages in Britain, just as the divine law is written in five books, all devoted to seeking out and setting forth one and the same kind of wisdom, namely the knowledge of sublime truth and of true sublimity. These are the English, British, Irish, Pictish as well as Latin languages; through the study of the scriptures, Latin is in general use among them all.]

When Bede published his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in 731, he included in his preface this famous comment on the languages in use in his own day.[1] In dovetailing Britain's linguistic complexity into the biblical patterning of the story he was about to relate, he betrayed his firm belief in the superiority of Latin as the language of Roman Christianity and of literate education. Implicit within Bede's conspectus is a narrative of fundamental significance: the demise of Latin as the signal of Britain's place within the Roman Empire, and its transformation into an elite schoolroom language necessary for a 'religion of the book', Christianity. In the course of this seismic linguistic shift, the universalizing features inherent within Christianity interacted with local particularities of language, politics and identity in exceptionally creative ways which transformed the cultural landscape. As will rapidly become clear, Ireland is deeply implicated in that British story: the purpose of this survey is to sketch the framework for these interconnected literary histories.

We should acknowledge at the outset that, throughout the centuries covered by this volume, writing was a separate activity from reading, and that writing in the sense of composing meaningful text was often distinct from writing in the sense of crafting the shapes of characters. The vast majority of the population was illiterate, and, of those who could read, even fewer could write. Instead, oral and symbolic communication bound most people to each other, their deities and even their ancestors. Nevertheless, literate modes of communication coexisted with non-written ones: early medieval men and women encountered writing by seeing it around them, marked on the landscape, in Christian books, or in the hands of royal or ecclesiastical officials. They would also have heard it read aloud by priests, bailiffs and sometimes even by kings, yet, unless the writing was in their local language, it would not have been comprehensible without a translator to hand. The written word was thus an elite mode of interaction, not an everyday one. It carried heavy symbolic value as an instrument of secular or ecclesiastical ideology, a feature of liturgical ritual, or a material remnant of the Roman era; its physical presence can rarely have been accompanied by direct comprehension of its verbal content. Nevertheless, writing has a privileged place in the study of the past. This reflects both its ability to convey meaning across distance and time and the ease with which it simultaneously constitutes and reflects social relationships, cultural capital, political hierarchies and aesthetic qualities. In seeking out the history of early medieval literature, we must constantly strive to restore it to its rightful position as a tenuous web of powerful textual contact spun to powerful effect against a backdrop of spoken and symbolic communication.

Writing is the representation of human speech in a system of agreed symbols which integrates cognition, technology and language, and thus demands multiple forms of analysis. The first section of this chapter rejects the different national narratives which have conventionally framed the literature of Britain and Ireland in the early Middle Ages. The second part substitutes commonalities and cross-currents by treating writing as a form of material culture. The final section reassesses the regional cultures of writing, books and literature in early medieval Britain and Ireland and concludes by emphasizing the multilingual environment of the transitional centuries between the Roman era and the Middle Ages.

Foundations and narratives

Bede's preface to his *Ecclesiastical History* lacks a term for the cluster of islands stretching from the Shetlands to the Scillies of which Britain and Ireland are

the two largest. His vocabulary followed that of classical Latin geographers who were familiar with both Britannia and Hibernia (Ireland) but did not regard what is sometimes styled the 'Atlantic Archipelago' as a single entity. Indeed, these islands have never shared an agreed collective nomenclature.[2] Rather, centuries of domination first by the medieval English empire and then by its British successor have left both a residue of disputed histories and a profound imprint on linguistic and literary culture. Bede's description of Britannia immediately necessitated mention of the adjacent island of Hibernia: the islands' geographical proximity had generated intertwined histories but distinct identities long before the Roman conquest of Britain. As Bede recognized, the history of the one cannot be written without reference to the other. And, because nowhere in the early Middle Ages did 'natural' frontiers or political borders determine cultural and linguistic differentiation, narratives shaped by post-medieval political and philological criteria severely distort the complex situation which existed in Britain and Ireland in our period.

This chapter commences as Roman rule in Britain ceased. However, imperial control of the province of Britannia had never been coterminous with the island of that name. Romanization had been far more intensive in the south-east lowlands than in the uplands of its western and northern fringes. Here, civic organization shaded off into a militarized zone which extended beyond the landmark 'frontier' of Hadrian's Wall that separated the Roman province from the peoples of 'free' Britain. Nevertheless, by *c.* 400, Rome's influence had leached beyond the province's boundaries, extending into the south of what is now known as 'Scotland' and across the Irish Sea into eastern parts of Ireland. Within the province of Britain, the termination of imperial rule did not bring an abrupt end to its literate Christian Latin culture either at the elite intellectual level or in less elevated contexts. In the most Romanized part of the province, its south-eastern quadrant, Roman literate culture seems to have foundered during the first half of the fifth century and had to be reintroduced by Christian missionaries from 597 as an exotic foreign import. Elsewhere the reverse happened, as the loosening of political control along the frontiers coincided with (and may well have facilitated) enhanced seepage of Roman cultural influence not only north of the frontier but also across the sea to Ireland. Indeed, the Romanization of Ireland has recently been described as 'a remarkable and unique post-Roman achievement'; something similar might

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2 For a succinct statement of the problem (and a defence of the terminology adopted for the series The Short Oxford History of the British Isles) see Langford, 'General Editor's Preface', pp. v–vi.

be said of southern Scotland.[3] As we shall see, the history of writing provides a sensitive index of these all-encompassing changes.

Whereas the end of political rule from Rome provides the starting point for this chapter, its terminus is the onset of Scandinavian attacks in the closing years of the eighth century. Whether viewed from a political, linguistic, economic or cultural perspective, the Viking Age marks a watershed whose literary implications are explored in Chapters 23 and 24. Although historians are now sceptical that the Viking invasions marked the 'passing of the old order' in Ireland, it is nevertheless the case that the Norse colony at Dublin (founded in 841) developed into a powerful kingdom which continued to contribute to Irish inter-kingdom rivalries long after losing control of a large swathe of central Britain in 954. To the north of the Hiberno-Norse kingdom of Dublin/York, an emerging dynastic power forged a new and enduring polity whose name, Alba, had centuries earlier been the Gaelic term for the entire island of Britain. Its dominant Gaelic identity nevertheless derived from a much more complex linguistic and ethnic past.[4] Alba, or the kingdom of the Scots (Latinized as *Scotia* or *Albania*), was one of two newly formed kingdoms on the British side of the Irish Sea whose expansionist tendencies contributed to the long-term reconfiguration of these older identities in the tenth century. The other emerged in the south-east, where the ascendancy of the West Saxon dynasty fostered the formation of a new political vocabulary of Englishness and 'England' (*englisc*, *Englalond*) during and after the reign of Alfred of Wessex (r. 871–99), and then, in the tenth century, exploited the rhetoric of 'Britannia' and 'Albion' for its own imperial pretensions.[5] Briefly stated, then, this chapter is after Rome but before Dublin, Alba and England.

The most notable feature of this political landscape is the absence of any stable hegemonic political power anywhere in either Britain or Ireland after the end of Roman rule and prior to 800. Although huge problems with the evidence (both written and archaeological) do not permit a firm outline of political developments to be sketched, it is clear that their hallmarks were fluidity and localism. In Britain, new forms of political organization followed the end of formalized ties to the Roman state apparatus of army, fiscal system and bureaucracy. Almost everywhere, political power devolved to an extremely local level. Warlords, whose militias were held together by ties of

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3 Clarke, 'Economy', p. 64. For Scotland, see Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland*, pp. 54–67, 83–93, 116–17.
4 Broun, 'Origin of Scottish Identity'; A. Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba*.
5 Foot, 'Making of *Angelcynn*'; M. Wood, 'Making of King Aethelstan's Empire'; Wormald, '*Engla lond*'; Crick, 'Edgar, Albion and Insular Dominion'.

patronage and kinship, exacted tribute and filled the vacuum left by educated officials running an imperial administration based upon writing. Both within and beyond the boundaries of the former province, these local (or at most regional) chieftaincies came to identify themselves in ethnic terms, although in practice most – probably all – of them incorporated individuals of differing genetic backgrounds. Early medieval ethnicity commonly used genealogy and shared history as the organizing principles for group identity and cohesion, but however politically persuasive, the fiction masked far more complex and interesting social realities. Furthermore, some tribute-seeking warlords managed to pass control from one generation to the next, and the emergence of dynastic kingship is clearly discernible in outline, though impossible to chart in detail. As Romanized ways of life faltered in the south-east but diffused further north, and warlordism developed into kingship, so the former sharp contrast between the complex structures of the imperial state within the province and much simpler chieftaincies beyond it yielded to a much less differentiated network of emerging small kingdoms competing with each other for prestige and resources.[6] By 600, therefore, the political landscape of south Britain more closely resembled that of the northern half of the island than at any time since the pre-Roman era. The trend towards convergence continued until interrupted by the Vikings: until *c.* 800 the differences in political power and organization between the north and south of Britain were more the result of topography, natural resources and access to continental Europe than of fundamentally different forms of polity.

For the same reason, the gulf in political organization between the two islands had been substantially reduced. In Ireland, the impact of Rome had only ever been indirect, mediated by merchants and slave raiders and readily absorbed into local culture. Roman cultural influence made itself felt in an island which, in *c.* 400, was home to hundreds of small, competing kingdoms, some of which managed to assert temporary superiority over their neighbours. Successful dynasties anchored their sacral power in the landscape and cultivated close relationships with elite specialists expert in a large corpus of orally transmitted custom, law and mythology. By *c.* 400, Christianity was spreading here – no doubt another sign of the secondary role of merchants and slavers as cultural brokers – and was introducing both its distinctive books written in the language of the distant Roman state and new forms of contact with the world beyond Britain. The shaft of light which this sheds on the socio-political life of the island facilitates the historian's task, but its contribution to

6 Fleming, *Britain after Rome*; James, *Britain in the First Millennium*.

the structural changes in the political landscape cannot be easily assessed. The general nature of those changes is nevertheless clear: a gradual drift towards the emergence of fewer, larger kingdoms controlled by dynasties which were able to maintain their power over many generations.[7]

By *c.* 800, then, Britain and Ireland alike were divided into a multiplicity of regional, competing dynastic kingships. None of these kingdoms, however, replicated the Roman state's reliance on writing as an instrument of intensive power and durable cohesion. Not until the reign of Alfred in the ninth century did writing begin to make a significant contribution to the formation of stable polities. Prior to then, royal writing was ideology unsupported by administration.

As Bede indicated, Britain and Ireland were also multilingual. Nevertheless, the interactions between languages, as also between language and writing, were in reality far more complex than Bede's neat schema implies. Two out of his four ethnic languages, Old Irish and Old English, had made the transition into written form by Bede's own day. Manuscript evidence confirms that the third, Old Welsh, had certainly done so by the early ninth century, but in actuality it may not have lagged as far behind as the exiguous Welsh manuscript tradition suggests. For all three, the earliest extant specimens are glosses in Latin manuscripts, with syntactically continuous written texts from a generation or so later, and in all three cases we see stages in the evolution of languages spoken to this day. The situation regarding Bede's fourth vernacular language, Pictish, is rather different, for it died out around 900. We know that kings' names had achieved written form in a regnal list before the collapse of the Pictish kingdom in 843; any discussion of whether the transition to alphabetic writing proceeded further than this statement of regal power founders on lack of evidence.[8]

Bede had adumbrated his linguistic teleology to support his vision of a Christian community sharing 'the catholic peace and truth of the Church universal' (*HE*, v.23). Centuries later, polemicists transformed his account into the cornerstone of England's national history. From the twelfth century onwards, Scottish, Irish and Welsh chronicles also found ways to explain the kingdoms of their own day by reference to the early medieval past of convert kings and local Christianities. Their mythmaking drew strength from late medieval political conflict and, from the sixteenth century, was enhanced by the consequences of Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

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7 T. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*; Ó Cróinín, 'Ireland, 400–800'.
8 M. O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, pp. 77–88.

Then, Enlightenment and Romantic era historical and philological scholarship helped these stereotypes to solidify into discrete national stories and parallel literary canons. In this way, myth, legend, and genuine detail extracted from chronicles, laws and poetry fused into tenacious historical perspectives which disinterested academic scholarship cannot easily demolish.

When we turn to the manuscript evidence, however, we discover that 'national' histories of the literatures of early medieval Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland cannot be sustained. The fact is that no early vernacular chronicle or legal text survives in a manuscript datable to before 800. This applies to all the earliest Old English law codes, for those of the seventh-century Kentish kings Æthelberht, Hlothhere and Eadric, then Wihtred, are extant only in the twelfth-century *Textus Roffensis*, while the oldest manuscript of the laws of Ine of Wessex (r. 688–726) is tenth-century.[9] Similarly, the oldest manuscript of early Irish law is twelfth-century.[10] As for vernacular annals, the oldest extant witness is the famous Parker Chronicle in Old English from the end of the reign of Alfred of Wessex. For Gaelic-speaking regions, scholars posit an annalistic tradition which began in Latin on Iona in the sixth or seventh century and spawned variants in Ireland. From the ninth century, these increasingly used the vernacular alongside Latin, yet no manuscript of Scottish or Irish annals in either language survives from before the late eleventh century.[11] The situation for Wales is similar, with manuscripts surviving from *c.* 1100 and a Latin annal tradition arguably maintained from the late eighth century onwards, although, unlike in Ireland, vernacular chronicles only began in the late Middle Ages.[12] Strictly speaking, then, vernacular laws and annals afford only a retrospective representation of these early centuries: without exception, they reach us through the interventions of generations of scribes and redactors, and in mediated form, not as first penned.

The fate of poetry is similarly complex. With the exception of Cædmon's *Hymn* and the runic verses on the Ruthwell Cross, the great majority of Old English poetry is transmitted in four manuscripts dating to the decades 975–1025, thus providing ample scope for discussion of the extent of the interval between composition and transmission for each poem (see Chapter 11). Although Old Welsh and Old Irish verse is

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9 Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 93–106, 163–72, 244–53, 277–80.

10 F. Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 225–31.

11 Parkes, 'Palaeography of the Parker Manuscript', pp. 153–4; N. Evans, *The Present and the Past*, p. 210.

12 K. Hughes, 'Welsh Latin Chronicles'.

discussed in Chapters 4, 25 and 26, it should be noted that, for almost all of it, the gap between putative date of composition and extant manuscript witnesses is even greater than for Old English poetry. *Y Gododdin* is a case in point: sometimes described as the 'oldest Scottish poem', this collection of Old Welsh verse concerning the 'heroic society' of north Britain survives in a single manuscript from the second half of the thirteenth century, Llyfr Aneirin (the Book of Aneirin). It reflects half a millennium of performance and transmission, making any attempt to extrapolate its 'original' language an exercise in hypothetical construction of a text, not the reconstruction of a lost one.[13]

Of surviving manuscripts from before *c.* 1100, a small proportion predates *c.* 800. Within them, the Latin tradition takes priority, and is surveyed in Chapter 5. This corpus of manuscripts shows how the written vernaculars slowly emerged in counterpoint with inherited classical and patristic learning, often within the same manuscript. Two examples, both from the cusp of the ninth century, demonstrate these intertwined linguistic traditions. The first is the Book of Armagh (Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 52; *CLA*, ii.270), completed by the scribe Ferdomnach in 807. It comprises a complete New Testament bookended with parallel dossiers of texts, one concerning St Patrick, the other St Martin of Tours (d. 397), the premier evangelizing saint of the western, Latin, half of the Roman Empire. The Patrician texts, some in Latin, others in Old Irish, include the earliest witness to the Latin Life of Patrick by the seventh-century author Muirchú, accompanied by a collection of local stories and memoranda about Patrick's mission in Ireland assembled by Tírechán (also in the seventh century). This assemblage crafts a grand statement of the property and jurisdictional claims of Patrick's church at Armagh out of a wide range of earlier written materials and oral traditions.[14] The overall purpose of the Book of Armagh is to elevate Patrick to the same pre-eminent status as Martin as a preacher of the Gospel and to support early ninth-century Armagh's claims to Irish jurisdictional ascendancy within the Church of Rome. Important not only as a key witness to the Hiberno-Latin and Old Irish texts it contains, it reminds us that codicological context shaped the way in which written texts were understood by their early medieval scribes, readers and audiences.

A second manuscript whose carefully selected contents propose a meaning greater than the sum of its parts is London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian B.vi, fols. 104–9. Datable to *c.* 810, this booklet presents a different

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13 Dumville, 'Palaeographical Considerations'.
14 Bieler (ed.), *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*.

approach to selecting historical texts but nevertheless seems to have been similarly politically motivated, as an assertion of the rights and interests of the archiepiscopal see of Canterbury (Kent).[15] It is well known for its Anglo-Saxon episcopal lists and its series of Old English genealogies which trace several Anglo-Saxon royal lines back to Woden, but, importantly, these follow a compilation of useful Latin information of widely disparate origin about the world, its inhabitants and their histories. Together, the episcopal lists and genealogies place Anglo-Saxon history and its pre-Christian origins firmly within the grand written narrative of Roman Christian time and space. Like the Book of Armagh, this small booklet witnesses both a sophisticated political consciousness and the pressures which the authoritative conventions of written Latin placed upon a traditionally oral society. In these two manuscripts, the vernacular bridged the gap between Latinate arguments and oral knowledge.

The Book of Armagh and Cotton Vespasian B. vi reveal how the writers, compilers and scribes of the early Middle Ages took a notably broad view of their place in the world, and used the vernacular to supplement and modify their Latin learning. Both manuscripts exemplify the themes which the remaining chapters of this book develop: how patristic texts were transmitted, received and reinterpreted across space and time; how identities were constructed and reconstructed from a complex cultural heritage; how writing transformed oral tradition; and how the written vernaculars emerged from the shadow of Latin. Early medieval rulers and scholars alike moved easily between one language zone and another: as the chapters below demonstrate, their world was persistently multilingual and multi-referential. Additional confirmation that its written cultures were inextricably interwoven comes from the material evidence for the practice of writing, to which we now turn.

Writing as craft

Writing in the early Middle Ages involved many different technical skills. Letters may be incised into a surface such as a wax tablet, bone, ivory or slate using a hard sharp point, commonly a stylus, although the tip of a knife blade can also be pressed into service. Another means of making characters involves dragging a pen dipped in ink over the surface of a material such as papyrus, parchment, fabric or bark. These are the basic techniques required for textual literacy. They involve some level of formal instruction in reading as well as the

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15 Keynes, 'Between Bede and the *Chronicle*'.

manual dexterity needed to manipulate a stylus or reed- or quill-pen to produce characters of modest, even tiny size. At its most rudimentary, then, writing requires some basic education; at its most refined, prolonged training and disciplined practice. But words can also be transferred from a written exemplar onto other media in ways which require different expertise but need not presuppose any schooling in letters. For example, letters can be punched, gouged, engraved or polished into metal or carved into wood. They can be chiselled into granite or sandstone, perhaps following the outlines of outsize characters drawn onto the stone with a piece of charcoal or a brush. They can be embroidered or woven on fabric.[16]

Although these are distinct skills, each with its specific expertise, they cannot be considered in isolation from each other. There are three reasons for this. First, the shape and layout of the letters of the alphabet was transferable from one medium to another.[17] In this respect, writing participated in the wider visual culture of early medieval Ireland and Britain, which was characterized by the interchange of motifs, forms of ornament and iconographies between manuscript illumination, stone sculpture, woodwork and metalwork. In the second place, the evolution of characteristic manuscript hands cannot be understood without reference to epigraphy. Inscriptions on stone, in other words, hold the key to unlocking the early history of writing in the two islands. Third, by taking the evidence provided by archaeology and material culture into account, we can open up avenues unavailable to textual and literary approaches, and thereby ensure that the history of writing is a larger subject than the history of literature, literacy or books.

In this context, it is crucial to note that, although the Latin alphabet had spread into Britain in tandem with Roman rule and continued to be the dominant form of writing throughout our period, it was by no means the only one. Around all the margins of the Empire, indigenous peoples appreciated and appropriated the power of the written word, but transformed it to meet their own cultural context in different ways.[18] Two are relevant here: runes and ogam. Both are alphabetic systems whose characters are made up of straight lines designed to be carved or scratched onto stone or wood, although they did occasionally make their way into manuscript contexts at a later date. Both were indigenous responses to the prestige and utility of Roman

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16 See Coatsworth, 'Text and Textile', pp. 199–200 for two Anglo-Saxon examples of *c.* 800, both of which survive in church treasuries on the continent.

17 Higgitt, 'Stone-cutter'.

18 J. M. H. Smith, *Europe after Rome*, chap. 1.

alphabetic writing and, unlike the new scribal systems invented in conjunction with the spread of Christianity along the eastern borders of the Roman Empire, neither of them emerged in a missionary environment. Both were commonly used for personal names and familial identities, or for brief formulaic utterances. A crucial difference between them, however, is that whereas the overwhelming majority of ogam inscriptions occur on large stone slabs or carved into the virgin rock, the early British runes are incised on highly portable objects; only appropriation for Christian purposes triggered their subsequent transference onto immobile stone monuments. They thus represent fundamentally different relationships between patron, producer and observer.

An adaptation of a selection of Greek and Latin character forms, runes had developed along the German frontier of the *imperium*. From there, settlers brought their knowledge of them to south-eastern Britain after the end of Roman rule. Fifth-, sixth- and early seventh-century runic inscriptions were confined to one or two words on a weapon, brooch, bowl, comb or the like. They are usually short series of letters, or simply alphabetic sequences; of those that have a decipherable meaning, some supply the name of the maker or owner, while others express a protective power and suggest talismanic status. They certainly do not suggest that runic literacy was anything more than an occasional practice among the wealthy elite. But runes were subsequently adapted to Christian contexts, and the vast majority of all specimens from Britain occur either on monastic grave-markers and standing crosses from north of the Humber and Mersey or on portable objects from the post-conversion period. The parity of status accorded to Latin and runic alphabets for Christian inscriptional purposes is clear from their use side by side on the coffin of St Cuthbert (d. 687), as well as on the eighth-century Ruthwell Cross (see Figure 3.3). Furthermore, not only did the monastic use of runes foster a reform of the runic alphabet, but it also enabled the appropriation of runic symbols to indicate two Old English sounds which lacked a precise equivalent in the Latin alphabet, 'th' and 'w'.[19]

Ogam, on the other hand, developed during or before the fourth century, either in Ireland under the stimulus of contacts with Roman Britain or along the westernmost shores of Britain. It was born of close interchange between the Gaelic world and those who spoke and wrote Latin. It enabled short Gaelic phrases, which were usually commemorative formulas, to be carved onto small or large stones and, in this respect too, drew inspiration from the Roman

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19 Parsons, *Recasting the Runes*.

epigraphical tradition. But unlike Latin, which arrayed words and characters in horizontal lines, ogam ran vertically: it did not defer to imperial inscriptional techniques, yet acknowledged and transformed their utility. Occasionally, like runes, ogam was also used to put an owner's name on an object. Although it persisted in Christian contexts for memorial inscriptions into the seventh century, by that date Roman imperial presence in Britain had given way to a common Christian culture spanning the Irish Sea, so ogam lost out to the Latin alphabet for flexibility, functionality and prestige.[20]

Scholarship on script in Ireland and Britain in the early Middle Ages relies upon a manuscript-based approach, but is constrained by the small number of manuscripts surviving from this period.[21] An emphasis on the material context of writing ameliorates this limited picture in various ways. When we take all manifestations of writing into account, from attempts to scratch out an alphabet of simple letter-forms on a slate to sophisticated works of poetry or theology, we greatly extend not only the quantity but also the quality of the available evidence. Although new discoveries in libraries and archives are not unknown, they remain rare, and are usually small fragments. Recent examples include a mutilated bifolium from an eighth-century Irish manuscript of Rufinus' *Ecclesiastical History* which had been the wrapper of a sixteenth-century medical manuscript, and part of a leaf from an eighth-century Northumbrian manuscript of the sermons of Augustine of Hippo.[22] By contrast, the amount of evidence recovered from the ground increases year by year. Some discoveries are truly spectacular, such as the Gospel book dating from *c.* 800 recovered from a peat bog at Faddan More (Co. Tipperary) in 2006, or the enigmatic gold alloy strip with an Old Testament verse engraved on it found in the Staffordshire Hoard in 2009.[23]

Hundreds of far more modest finds significantly alter our knowledge of the geographical distribution, social contexts and cultural significance of writing with every new discovery. Finds of styli and portable inscriptions indicate that a common technology of writing existed throughout early medieval Britain and Ireland, as suitable for Latin as for runes or ogam. They also reveal evidence of writing at sites unrecorded in documentary evidence and to which no manuscripts have ever been attributed. Some of

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20 H. A. King, 'Ogham-Inscribed Antler Handle', p. 318; McManus, *Guide to Ogam*; J. Stevenson, 'Beginnings of Literacy in Ireland'.
21 Gameson (ed.), *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*.
22 Breen, 'New Irish Fragment'.
23 Kelly *et al.*, 'Faddan More Psalter'; Ganz, 'The Text of the Inscription'; Okasha, 'Staffordshire Hoard Inscription'.

these, such as Tintagel (Cornwall) and Dunadd (Argyll), were certainly high-status secular sites; others, including Flixborough (Lincs.) and Brandon (Suffolk) less definitely so.[24] Styli are generally used to write either on wooden tablets coated with wax or on soft stone, but fine ones also serve for making ink-free marks on parchment, so-called dry-point writing. Caches of early medieval inscribed slates indicate a hitherto unsuspected geography of writing in the west of Britain, including slates with Latin letter trials and casual doodles from both Tintagel and Dunadd.[25] Wooden tablets, on the other hand, survive from south-eastern Britain (Blythborough, Suffolk) and Ireland (Springmount Bog, Co. Antrim).[26] The former has undecipherable runes and Latinate letter sequences. The latter, in Latin, is a bound set of six tablets which offer unparalleled insights into the training of scribes around the year 600.[27] Of the two individuals whose hands are detectable on them, Hand I was the more experienced. He formed his letters in a manner which indicates that he was also trained in the advanced craft of writing with a pen on parchment, whereas Hand II had not yet made the transition from stylus to quill.[28] Supplementary evidence of schooling comes from the island of Inchmarnock in the Clyde estuary (Argyll and Bute), where a shaky founda-tional hand copies out a Latin exercise on one slate, while others have letter trials and alphabetic sequences in both Latin and ogam (Figure 1.1). Of the dozen slates with figurative scenes, one depicts a complex pictorial narrative which, it has been suggested, might have been used for schoolroom storytelling.[29]

Primarily although not exclusively ephemeral in use (the Springmount Bog tablets are a fair copy of some Psalms), styli, slates and tablets are witnesses to a mode of education which preceded scribal training in pen-manship. They may even hint at rudimentary pragmatic literacy in the service of elites. Extant manuscript books and documents testify to a differ-ent set of artisanal skills, those needed to turn animal hides into the parch-ment of which manuscripts were made, and to manufacture the necessary ink, pigments and coverings. Although the same basic principles and

24 Ewan Campbell, 'Archaeology of Writing'; Evans *et al.*, *Life and Economy*, p. 125 (Flixborough); Webster and Backhouse (eds.), *Making of England*, pp. 81–8 (Brandon). J. Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 204–9, argues that Flixborough and Brandon were ecclesiastical rather than secular sites.
25 Ewan Campbell, 'Archaeology of Writing', p. 141 (Tintagel), p. 142 (Dunadd).
26 Armstrong and Macalister, 'Wooden Book'; Webster and Backhouse (eds.), *Making of England*, pp. 80–1.
27 *CLA*, supplement, p. 1684.
28 G. Charles-Edwards, 'Springmount Bog Tablets', pp. 27–31.
29 C. Lowe, *Inchmarnock*, pp. 128–49, 151–75.

1.1 Incised slate with Latin and ogam. One side of this slate from Inchmarnock (Argyll and Bute) bears the Latin phrase *adeptus sanctum premium* written out twice in insular minuscule. The words are from a seventh-century Hiberno-Latin hymn in the Antiphonary of Bangor. The other side has an incomplete ogam alphabet, written horizontally, plus a quatrefoil spiral design.

techniques underlay the construction of all early medieval manuscript books, there were such great variety and flexibility in actual practice that the material specificities of book-making cannot be reduced to clear regional or chronological templates. Neither the methods of preparing and arranging the parchment leaves nor the recipes for making ink are susceptible to ethnic labelling in this period.[30] Whereas the disparities testify to the ready adaptation of artisanal techniques to disparate local resources, the commonalities are a reminder that the universalizing impetus of Christianity had a material dimension alongside its ideological one.

Here too, archaeology can significantly supplement information gleaned from the study of extant books themselves, in terms of both the materiality and the geography of writing. The traditional evidence for manuscript literacy in Pictland long remained the indirect evidence of visual depictions of clerics carrying books, together with a handful of Latin inscriptions. The picture was

30 Gameson, 'Material Fabric'.

transformed by the discovery in 2004 of the remains of an eighth-century parchment-making workshop at Portmahomack (Easter Ross), north of Inverness.[31] By enlarging our understanding of the range of tools and methods which might be used in the manufacture of manuscripts, it has also prompted the reinterpretation of unusual clusters of finds from other sites which may also suggest the manufacture of parchment, including not only Lindisfarne but also Dunadd.[32]

Consideration of writing within the context of its material culture also facilitates reflection on its social roles. Take, for example, the issue of portability. The Faddan More Psalter was found with its accompanying leather satchel and its strap.[33] It would presumably have been carried slung over the shoulder in a manner similar to that of the book-carrying clerics on Pictish symbol stones, or the book copied by Columba which a boy lost in a river when its satchel slipped off his shoulder as he crossed a bridge but which was found undamaged months later.[34] Indeed, any book was portable, and that was one reason why they feature as gifts, even one as exceptionally large as the Codex Amiatinus, intended as a present for the pope (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, MS Amiatino 1 [*CLA*, III.299]; see Figure 1.2). Ceolfrith, the elderly abbot of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, must have transported it to Italy in 716 by pack animal or cart, for its 1,030 large folios plus the original covers and a protective travelling case will have weighed about 90 pounds.[35] Yet in other media, writing is immobile in the landscape. The sixth-century Latin memorial inscription commemorating the grave of one Dervacus son of Iustus stands 2.8 metres tall, beside (or very close to) the Roman road where it was erected at a spot easily visible from lower down the valley, a landmark for travellers over many centuries.[36] By contrast, the ogam carved directly on the rocky outcrop of Dunadd went unrecognized until 1953, and (photographs apart) only those standing directly on the rock can see it.[37]

It has already been noted that an important difference between runes and ogam is that the former was primarily a script for portable purposes and only secondarily for commemorative monuments. However, both systems were

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31 Carver, *Portmahomack*, pp. 60, 119–25.
32 Ewan Campbell, 'Archaeology of Writing', p. 142; Gameson, 'Material Fabric', p. 15.
33 Kelly *et al.*, 'Faddan More Psalter'.
34 Adomnán, *Life of Columba*, II.9.
35 Bruce-Mitford, *Art of the Codex Amiatinus*, p. 2.
36 Redknap and Masters Lewis, *Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones*, pp. 251–3 (B255) with comments at p. 135.
37 Forsyth, 'Ogham Inscription at Dunadd'.
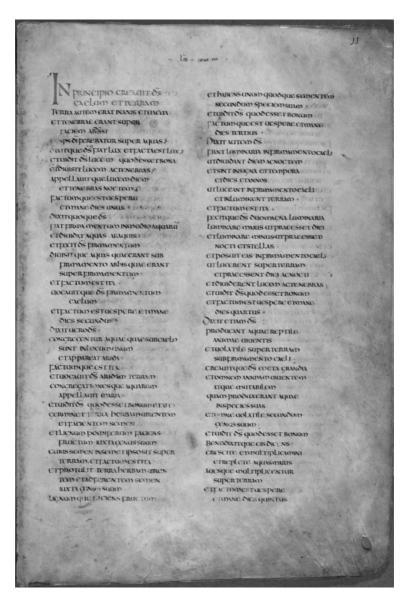
1.2 Codex Amiatinus (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Amiatini 1), fol. 11ʳ. This Vulgate bible pandect of grandiose format (*c.* 505 × 340 mm) replicates the two-column layout and uncial script of late antique codices so closely that it was formerly thought to have been produced in Italy, although its origin in Wearmouth-Jarrow in *c.* 690–700 is now conclusively established. This folio contains the text of Genesis 1:1–23.

not readily visible unless immobilized on stone. Latin, by contrast, was much more varied in scale, occurring on a huge variety of media, and as readily adapted for decorative effect as for communicating verbal meaning. Along the western coast of Britain from Cornwall to south-western Scotland, its inscriptional use in the early Middle Ages perpetuated and developed Romano-British epigraphic habits, which had, by the eighth century, been adopted in Ireland too. In south-eastern Britain, however, like all forms of Latin writing, it had to be revived – or reintroduced – as part of the process of Christianization. It is portable metal objects, however, that best demonstrate the ease with which Latin could be accommodated in different rhetorics of display. Contrast a seventh-century necklace from Kent with an eighth-century helmet from Yorkshire. The former makes tremendous decorative play with imported sixth-century Mediterranean gold coins, but their legends are irrelevant to the jewellery's message of prestige and Romanness. The latter has an inscription on brass bands surmounting the crown of the head which invokes the protection of the Christian God for the warrior who wore it into battle. Despite the high decorative quality of the repoussé lettering, the text and its message take priority over the visual effect.[38]

Characters and words need not have much, if any, semantic context; instead they may carry much associative meaning. There are many examples of this. Personal names, whether penned in books, inscribed on a brooch, sword-hilt, gaming board or spindle whorl, easily convey claims to ownership.[39] Pen-trials and doodles in manuscripts and on writing slates may indicate effortful practice or lack of concentration, perhaps even boredom with the task in hand. Whether on the display pages of Insular Gospel books such as the Lindisfarne Gospels (see Figure 6.1) or on coins made into a necklace, writing may have an overwhelmingly decorative function. It may have an invocatory, protective or prophylactic meaning, summoning up spiritual help or warding off attack from evil spirits, disease or human enemies. Although literature exists essentially through the medium of writing, this is far from the sole purpose of committing words to stone, parchment, metal or wax tablet. The chapters which follow all address texts which participate in much wider cultures of writing: this hinterland explains some of the distinctive features of the early medieval literary landscape.

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38 Webster and Backhouse (eds.), *Making of England*, pp. 48–50, 60–2, nos. 31(b) and 47.
39 Ewan Campbell, 'Archaeology of Writing', p. 143, note 27 (spindle whorl); C. Lowe, *Inchmarnock*, pp. 122, 130 (gaming board). Both examples are in ogam.

Transforming the Roman legacy

The early sixth-century Byzantine historian Zosimus reports that in the summer of 410, Emperor Honorius sent letters to the cities of *Brettania* ordering them to defend themselves.[40] Another sixth-century account of the end of Roman rule in Britain, that of the British moralist Gildas, also emphasizes the role of writing, this time from the diametrically opposite perspective, that of the British who felt abandoned by the emperor. The Britons, he says, sent envoys to Rome with a letter requesting military aid; a legion was sent but returned home when it had accomplished its task. Subsequent written appeals conveying the 'groans of the British' went unheeded, and they fell into the grip of vice, barbarians and famine.[41] Thus, as told with the hindsight of a century or more, Roman rule in Britain either ended with a written imperial instruction, or with letters from subjects to their ruler that remained unanswered. In all likelihood, the end of Roman rule was more protracted than either of these accounts proposes.[42] They nevertheless highlight a commonplace of the Roman world: that the state expressed its will through writing as well as by force of arms, while subjects relied on the written word for a wide range of purposes, including communication with distant masters. However Britain became detached from Rome, it signalled the end of the official promotion of a literate polity. Writing devolved to individuals and Christian churches, where they existed, and no longer spoke for a distant imperial regime. We now turn to the profound implications for the cultures of writing in Britain and Ireland.

Appreciation of this situation must take into account the fact that, in common with other western provinces of the empire, the end of Roman rule in Britain was accompanied by demographic fluidity around its borders. Extensive raiding and plundering from all directions had certainly destabilized the province from the 360s onwards. Although unreliable in chronology and historical detail, Gildas testifies to the sense of shock and outrage felt by British communities subjected to attacks by Irish and Pictish raiders, as well as by seaborne warriors originating in north-western continental Europe. The circumstances in which raiders may have become settlers remain contested, as does the chronology of any such transformation; by the same token, it is still

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40 However, there are grounds for suspecting that Zosimus may have misinterpreted his fifth-century source, and that Honorius wrote to *Brettia* (the Italian city of Bruttium), not to *Britannia* (the province of Britain): see Esmonde Cleary, *Ending of Roman Britain*, pp. 137–8.

41 Gildas, *Ruin of Britain*, pp. 15, 18, 20.

42 I. Wood, 'Final Phase'.
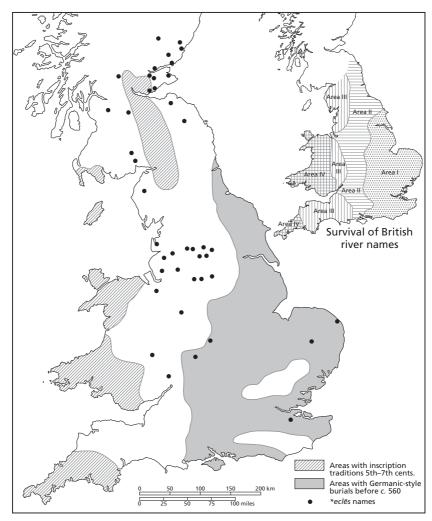
a vexed question whether Roman or post-Roman authorities employed 'barbarian' troops under treaty arrangements and, if so, whether they subsequently lost control of them. Despite the absence of consensus – and the unlikelihood of ever reaching one, given the impossibility of reconciling the mass of archaeological evidence with the problematic and meagre textual record – the effects are clear in language and literature.

In brief, whether groups migrated peacefully or aggressively (as kin-groups, peoples or war-bands), whether individuals deliberately sought out opportunities for their own purposes (as merchants, mercenaries or missionaries) or were constrained to move by intimidation or force (as exiles or slaves), they took with them their own language, religion and modes of writing.[43] This contributed greatly to the reconfiguration of the cultural map of Britain in the course of the fifth century. By the sixth century, three distinct but overlapping zones are discernible, distinguished by archaeological and linguistic criteria (see Figure 1.3).[44] The first was western, facing Ireland: it extended as far east as a line drawn, very approximately, from Edinburgh to Exeter. Western Britain was, in effect, the eastern littoral of an Irish Sea cultural province; it provides exceptional evidence for an unbroken tradition of inscriptional writing in a multilingual environment and also for the perpetuation into the sixth century of a high level of Latin erudition, as achieved by Gildas.[45] Its eastern counterpart was the south-eastern quadrant of the island, south of a line from Newcastle-upon-Tyne to Bournemouth. The material evidence for early, intensive Germanic influence is concentrated here, and is accompanied by extensive place-name evidence for the early adoption of Germanic speech in the form of Old English. We may regard it as the eastern seaboard zone, extending from the North Sea through the eastern reaches of the English Channel. In between these two maritime-facing regions lay the third belt, stretching from the beaches of Northumbria and Lothian to the coasts of Somerset and Dorset. In a piecemeal fashion, it gradually passed under Anglo-Saxon political control between the mid-sixth and later seventh centuries, but prior to that seems to have remained home to British communities organized into modest kingdoms which are all but invisible archaeologically. In due course, this region too adopted Old English, but retained a significant heritage

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43 T. Charles-Edwards (ed.), *After Rome*; Fleming, *Britain after Rome*.
44 I follow J. Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 10–34, with map on p. 14. For the same zoning based on philological arguments, see A. Woolf, 'The Britons'.
45 T. Charles-Edwards, 'Language and Society', pp. 715–20; Lapidge, 'Gildas's Education'; Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*.

Survival of British river names

Areas with inscription traditions 5th–7th cents.

Areas with Germanic-style burials before *c.* 560

eclēs names

1.3 The cultural provinces of early medieval Britain. The western zone is characterized by inscribed stones and the omnipresence of British river names in Area IV. The eastern zone is indicated by Germanic-style burials, with very isolated evidence for occasional pockets of Christian continuity; in Area I British river names survive only for major rivers. In the central belt, the concentration of place names with the element 'Eccles-' (British Latin *eclēs*, from Latin *ecclesia*, 'a church') indicates that British Christian communities persisted after this region passed under Anglo-Saxon control in the seventh century. British river names are common here in Area II, especially towards its western fringe, where even many streams retain a British name (Area III).

of Brittonic toponyms. This tripartite division, along two roughly north–south axes, guides the discussion which follows.

There is no better demonstration of the ways in which writing reveals the cultural currents which ebbed and flowed across all three areas than to start around the Irish Sea. Here, in places which formerly had been either the militarized frontiers of the Empire or had lain entirely beyond Roman rule, we encounter fascinating evidence of the ways in which Roman habits of writing participated in a slow process of cultural adaptation and transformation which spanned both sides of the Irish Sea. The frontier regions of Roman Britain had a particular penchant for resorting to writing, and always did so in Latin, not the local British language or the many other languages spoken by troops, merchants and officials who originated elsewhere in this polyglot empire. This is especially true along Hadrian's Wall. As a consequence of the huge number of writing tablets and inscribed, often sculpted, monuments from the Wall's vicinity, the formal and informal scripts, regional orthography and local British dialect of Latin are all well known.[46] Deriving directly from these Roman practices was the epigraphic habit of the western littoral zone of Britain in the fifth to seventh centuries, one of whose diagnostic features is numerous commemorative Latin inscriptions that perpetuate the rough-hewn form and non-calligraphic script common among the late Roman inscriptions of the militarized frontier regions of the province.[47]

A distinctive subgroup of these inscribed stones clusters in Devon-Cornwall and south Wales, with outliers in north Wales, the Isle of Man and Scotland. They are bilingual Latin/ogam stones, with a small number in ogam alone.[48] Some may mark the burial places of Gaelic speakers who had settled along the western coast of Britain and then slowly assimilated into the local population, but not before having established a kingdom with a Gaelic dynasty in Dyfed (south-western Wales).[49] Further north, across the North Channel, Gaelic dynasties also established control of much of the western seaboard of Scotland. Although it has been argued that most or all of the reported accompanying migration and settlement in Argyll was

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46 Mattingly, *Imperial Possession*, pp. 154–65, 199–224; Pearce, 'Archaeology, Writing Tablets and Literacy'.

47 Sims-Williams, *Celtic Inscriptions of Britain*, pp. 1–3. For palaeographical and historical interpretation, see Handley, 'Origins of Christian Commemoration'; Tedeschi, 'Osservazioni', with an English summary in Tedeschi, 'Some Observations'.

48 T. Charles-Edwards, 'Language and Society', pp. 704–6; McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, p. 44. For the ogam inscription discovered at Selkirk in 2002, see Forsyth, '*Hic memoria perpetua*', p. 122.

49 T. Charles-Edwards, 'Language and Society', p. 704.

retrospective mythmaking rather than historical reality, the Gaelic contribution to the changing linguistic and cultural map of Britain is clear.[50]

Importantly, however, script did not coincide with language. Ogam stones are rare among the otherwise plentiful traces of Irish presence in western Scotland. By contrast, the Picts appropriated ogam for monumental commemorative inscriptions and small domestic labels in their own language (a form of Brittonic), and continued to use it long after its monumental use had been abandoned in Ireland and Wales. Although they did occasionally resort to the Latin alphabet, they usually avoided it, thereby rejecting its imperial connotations.[51] Thus monumental commemoration, the Latin alphabet and ogam followed differing regional trajectories, indicating the selective appropriation of elements of the Roman legacy of writing in different localities along and beyond the frontiers of the imperial province. Equally, by revealing how cultural influences flowed back and forth across the Irish Sea and North Channel, they exemplify the variety to be found within the Irish Sea cultural province.

As Christianity spread beyond the province's frontiers into southern Scotland and Ireland, missionaries not only preached but carried their Christian texts, taught the craft skills needed to replicate them and developed instructional techniques to propagate its unfamiliar language. Their traces take many forms, including a stratum of Christian British Latin words adopted into Old Irish, and the reputation which learned British teachers such as Uuinniau acquired among their Irish pupils.[52] The Springmount Bog tablets also shed light on the cultural gulf that needed to be bridged to make a written religion accessible. Tírechán recounted that when Patrick returned to Ireland with several companions to preach to his former captors, the missionaries were carrying 'written tablets in their hands like Moses'.[53] The Irish feared these were offensive weapons that turned into iron swords by night, but in view of the fact that the Springmount Bog tablets were found tied together in a box-like set designed to be slung across the shoulder on a strap, we should envisage that a missionary carrying such a set of Gospel tablets could seem to be armed with a stumpy wooden club or knife box (Figure 1.4).
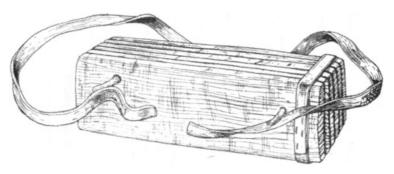
The Springmount Bog tablets are crucial to tracing the evolution of late Roman scripts after c. 400 in the Irish Sea cultural province, for they bridge the chronological gap between the first phase of inscribed stones and the earliest

50 Ewan Campbell, 'Were the Scots Irish?'; Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland*, pp. 144–9.
51 Forsyth, 'Literacy in Pictland'; Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland*, pp. 43–67, 375–9.
52 T. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 176–81, 291.
53 Bieler (ed.), *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, pp. 122–3.

1.4 The Springmount Bog tablets. Remnants of leather fastenings were found with the six wooden tablets. This sketch indicates the thongs which kept the tablets in sequence, the retaining band slipped over the end to hold them closed, and the carrying straps.

extant parchment books, as well as between the techniques of incising and penning letters.[54] They add weight to the strong (but not incontrovertible) argument that the Irish adopted habits of book-making and ways of writing directly from the practices of late Roman Britain. Indeed, in method of parchment preparation, layout and script, early British and Irish writing habits were archaic by the standards of sixth-century Italy and Gaul. In all probability, what has become known as the 'Insular' tradition of book manufacture and scribal practice had evolved out of late Roman conventions in Britain and around the Irish Sea in the fifth century, although its practices only become evident from *c*. 600.[55]

Equally importantly, the Irish had worked out how to adapt the Latin alphabet to their own language before 600 (and possibly long before). Used in the margin of Latin manuscripts, it was an effective instructional aid, especially for comprehending biblical texts. The language's first manuscript occurrence is the dry-point glosses in the Ussher Gospels of *c*. 600 (Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 55 [*CLA*, II.271]). Penned glosses survive from the end of the period under review, although the earliest extant set, in a manuscript of the Pauline Epistles from the late eighth century (Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, MS M.p.th.f.12 [*CLA*, IX.1403]), certainly draws on a lost archetype. From the late eighth century and penned on the continent, there also survives the earliest specimen of continuously written Old Irish, a homily intercalated into a collection of ecclesiastical canons when an

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54 G. Charles-Edwards, 'Palaeography of the Inscriptions', and 'The Springmount Bog Tablets'.
55 M. Brown, 'Writing in the Insular World'; Gameson, 'Material Fabric'.

older exemplar was copied (Cambrai, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 679 (619) [*CLA*, VI.741]).[56]

In tandem with working out how to write their own language, the Irish pioneered forms of Latin instruction specifically for those who learned it as a foreign, schoolroom language.[57] By contrast, Latin remained a living, spoken language in some parts of western Britain into the seventh century. When Latin finally dropped out of everyday use and was reduced to a learned language alongside multiple, spoken vernaculars, the last traces of Roman linguistic conventions ended. And with the emergence of the first written vernacular, we enter the Middle Ages.[58]

On the opposite shore of Britain, along the North Sea and English Channel, the story of writing was very different. Although the south-eastern part of Britain had been far more thoroughly Romanized than the remainder, and had supported a vigorous civil society, its written, especially epigraphic, habits seem always to have been more restricted than in rural and military areas, and this surely contributed to the collapse of literate culture in the post-Roman era. Isolated pockets of Christian practice do seem to have persisted, but in the absence of any evidence, it is impossible to say whether they owned any books or maintained any written traditions. Instead, as this region became heavily Germanized, runes made an occasional appearance. A fifth-century bone gaming-piece from a cemetery at Caistor by Norwich (Norfolk) is probably the oldest specimen.[59] Although assessment of the extent of their use depends on fortuitous archaeological discoveries, it clearly was never more than the occasional word, invocation or mark of ownership.

In south-eastern Britain, the resurgence of Latin writing was the direct consequence of the spread of Christianity. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* presents an attractive narrative of how this came about, starting with Augustine's mission sent from Rome by Pope Gregory the Great which reached Kent in 597, and culminating with an assessment of the condition of Roman Christianity throughout Britain when the author laid down his pen. Famously, Bede's scholarly career marks the culmination of Christian learning

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56 Kenney, *Sources*, nos. 111, 461, pp. 283, 635–6. More generally, see Ó Cróinín, 'Hiberno-Latin Literature', pp. 379–80; and Russell, 'What was Best of Every Language', pp. 412–13. The Old Irish notes in the Book of Armagh are the oldest extant piece of Old Irish written in Ireland (above, p. 26).

57 Ó Cróinín, 'Hiberno-Latin Literature', pp. 376–7.

58 T. Charles-Edwards, 'Language and Society'; Sims-Williams, 'Five Languages of Wales'.

59 Parsons, *Recasting the Runes*, pp. 47–8; Hines, 'Runic Inscriptions', pp. 441–2.

and Latin scholarship in the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, but also has much to tell us about the history of writing more broadly.

From the beginning of the missions, even before the establishment of schools, the reintroduction of Latin literacy took two forms. On the one hand, Gregory kept in touch with his missionaries by letter, in typical Roman fashion. Although his correspondence survives only in later registers of archive copies, the originals were quite possibly on papyrus rather than parchment. On the other, the missionaries brought with them books, only one of which has certainly come down to us, the so-called 'St Augustine Gospels' (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 286 [*CLA*, II.126]). Of sixth-century Italian origin, it plausibly came with the first group of missionaries to arrive from Rome, and was preserved at Canterbury throughout the Middle Ages.[60] Exacerbating the poor rate of manuscript survival from this early date may have been the presence in the missionaries' baggage of papyrus codices, whose chances of survival in the damp British climate were minimal. It has been suggested, however, that an elegantly written fragment of a sixth-century papyrus copy of Gregory the Great's homilies may be the vestigial token of the pastoral texts available to guide Augustine at Canterbury.[61] Both this papyrus leaf and the St Augustine Gospels conform to the contemporary codicological norms of Italy and Gaul, as can be ascertained from manuscripts extant on the continent.

In late antiquity, literary books always differed from administrative documents in both script and layout. On the continent, moreover, both book-making practices and documentary hands had evolved in important ways since the fourth century. Gregory's letters would have had a functional appearance, and are likely to have been penned in the the informal, cursive script common for letter-writing in late sixth-century Italian ecclesiastical writing offices. By contrast, the manuscripts which missionaries and pilgrims brought from Gaul and Italy had the formal script and stately appearance deemed appropriate for Christian holy books. Their generous margins and spacious lettering confirmed that no expense had been spared in their preparation. They set a standard for the material presentation of Christian scripture which was significantly different from the conventions of the Irish Sea cultural province.

Augustine's mission of 597 was the first of many moments of direct contact between Rome and Canterbury. Particular attention in this context needs to be paid to the arrival of the Greek Theodore of Tarsus to take up the see in

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60 McKitterick, 'Exchanges', p. 315.
61 Babcock, 'Papyrus Codex'.

668. Sent by Pope Vitalian and accompanied by Hadrian, a monk of North African origin serving as abbot of a monastery near Naples, Theodore's pontificate was marked by the emergence of Canterbury as a major centre of scholarship, nourished by the Greek and Latin learning the two men brought with them. Their arrival posed enormous linguistic challenges, for themselves as much as for their pupils, and has left its trace in later copies of students' verbatim notes of their exposition of biblical passages. Equally important are collections of Old English glosses derived from the texts being studied, and a manuscript written in southern England during the last quarter of the seventh century allows us to get very close indeed to Theodore's classroom. Épinal (Bibliothèque municipale, MS 72 (2), fols. 94–107 [*CLA*, VI.760]) preserves a list of Latin words extracted from texts studied at Canterbury, with each word followed by its vernacular equivalent. Other, somewhat later glossaries preserve extensive lists of classical and patristic words accompanied by their Old English translation that had been accumulated by combining batches of glosses from several different glossed texts or sets of students' notes.[62]

No later than the pontificate of Theodore, the nascent churches of the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had begun to prepare written title deeds (charters) to the lands bestowed on them. Whereas on the continent charters were produced in the rapidly penned cursive script used for all administrative and documentary purposes, the scribe of the earliest surviving original Anglo-Saxon charter, datable to 679, made his document more visually authoritative by adopting a formal majuscule bookhand (London, British Library, MS Cotton Augustus II.2 [*ChLA*, III.182]). He also used parchment, rather than papyrus, although the latter still remained in common use for documentary purposes in Italy. If it is possible to generalize on the basis of the dozen or so surviving original Anglo-Saxon charters from before 800, the dignity and Romanizing aura of a formal bookhand continued to have some appeal for charter scribes, but mostly they appreciated the advantages of a more efficient minuscule script.[63] We will return below to the question of where and how they learned it.

The most important of the three cultural provinces was the central section of Britain, wedged between the Irish Sea and eastern seaboard zones. It enjoyed easy coastal or river access in both directions, particularly at its

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62 Lapidge, 'School of Theodore and Hadrian', and 'Career of Aldhelm', pp. 31–48; Pheifer, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Glossaries'.

63 Wormald, *Bede and the Conversion of England*. See Chapter 2 below, pp. 54–6, for further discussion of indebtedness to Roman scribal traditions.

northern and southern extremities. In this intermediate space, a distinctive culture of writing developed, whose main symptom is a fluid interplay of cultural styles drawn from both the western, Ireland-facing, and eastern, continent-facing, parts of the island. This must have built upon local foundations, for although it remains impossible to identify any substantive contribution to literate culture from the local British Christian communities, an indigenous substrate of local post-Roman Christianity certainly persisted in many places.[64] The third cultural province can be illustrated with reference to two of its best-known early centres of Christian learning, Malmesbury (Wiltshire) in the south and Wearmouth-Jarrow (Northumbria) in its northern sector. Both underscore the futility of attempts to identify a single origin point for the cultures of writing and manuscript production in this central zone.

Judging by its founder's name (Máeldubh), Malmesbury's earliest religious settlement was Irish, yet its famous early house author, Abbot Aldhelm (d. 709/10), was of West Saxon royal stock. He received part of his education under Adomnán on Iona, and his extensive corpus of Latin writing confirms his deep familiarity with seventh-century Hiberno-Latin literature. He then moved south to Canterbury, where he studied under Theodore and Hadrian, supplementing his learning with the late antique Mediterranean instruction available there and polishing his exceptional Latinity. Additionally, he is known to have visited both Rome and the British communities in Dumnonia (Devon and Cornwall), and his correspondence includes exchanges of letters with British and Anglo-Saxon rulers as well as with Irish and Anglo-Saxon scholars.[65] Aldhelm's wide range of contacts and literary models typifies the synthesizing cultural style characteristic of the 'central belt' of Britain.

Wearmouth-Jarrow is famous as the community where Bede spent all except the earliest years of his life, and about whose founder, Benedict Biscop, and first abbot, Ceolfrith, he wrote with such warmth. Together with its Romanizing liturgy, architecture and sculpture, its library of patristic texts, including many books fetched from Rome, marks it out as a northern outlier of the eastern seaboard cultural province, with its dependence on the written culture of Italy and Gaul for both texts and scripts. Manuscripts produced there, however, tell a more complex story. On the one hand, the Codex Amiatinus is witness to a perfect mastery of late antique Mediterranean script and modes of book production, and makes a deliberate statement of

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64 J. Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 30–3; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*.
65 Lapidge, 'Career of Aldhelm'; and Chapter 5 below, pp. 132–9.

affiliation to the orthodoxy and leadership of the Roman Church (see Figure 1.2 above). On the other hand, several of the other manuscripts produced there in the eighth century melded Italian and Irish influences in various ways.[66]

In common with many other eighth-century centres of manuscript and charter production in Britain, both in the parts under Anglo-Saxon political control and elsewhere, scribes at Wearmouth-Jarrow made frequent use of a minuscule hand which derived from western Britain and Ireland, in preference to the bookhands and documentary cursive scripts current on the continent at that time. It had grown out of Irish efforts to master the informal late Roman scripts they learned from their British teachers, and then to reorganize them in a way which made it easier to comprehend Latin. As Chapter 2 shows, a characteristic script known as 'Insular minuscule' had emerged in the sixth century throughout the Irish Sea cultural province. In addition to its use for the earliest surviving manuscripts written in Ireland, Irish missionaries to Britain and to the continent exported versions of it wherever they went. On Iona, for example, Dorbéne used it when he copied Adomnán's *Life of Columba* within a decade of the author's death in 704 (Schaffhausen, Stadtbibliothek, MS Generalia 1 [*CLA*, VII.998]). The earliest surviving manuscripts from the Welsh margin of the Irish Sea are ninth century and confirm that this characteristic hand was in normal use for Latin and Old Welsh. It also occurs on some inscribed stones.[67]

This script had several advantages. A high level of calligraphic regularity could be achieved; it was fairly quick to write; it was economical in its use of parchment; and it was suitable for both Latin and the vernacular. As part of their determination to master Latin, the Irish commonly wrote a word-by-word translation above or alongside the Latin as a gloss to aid comprehension, without differentiating the hand. And as Old Irish moved from a marginal position of dependency on Latin to that of an independent written language in its own right, so 'Insular minuscule' established itself as one script applicable to two languages.

Two points follow for our understanding of the early cultures of writing in the Anglo-Saxon parts of Britain. In the first place, though heavily indebted to the sixth- and seventh-century examples of writing and book production imported from the continent, the churches of the south-eastern quadrant of Britain rapidly appreciated the utility of Insular minuscule script. Scribes in a wide range of locations throughout central and southern England employed it for documents which were preserved in the archives of Canterbury Cathedral,

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66 Parkes, *Scriptorium of Wearmouth-Jarrow*.
67 Lapidge, 'Latin Learning in Dark Age Wales'; Lindsay, *Early Welsh Script*.

preferring it over the formal, slow majuscule bookhands. Wealdhere, bishop of London, chose it when he wrote to Archbishop Brihtwold of Canterbury in 704/5; his letter is the earliest extant original letter in the Latin West (*ChLA*, III.185).[68] Insular minuscule is the autograph hand of two Anglo-Saxon missionaries to the continent: Boniface (d. 754), educated in south-western England, and Willibrord (d. 739), educated in Northumbria and Ireland; both men visited Rome and felt the strong pull of its authoritative culture.[69] It features in many (though not all) of the extant books written both north and south of the Humber in the eighth and early ninth centuries.

Two of those hold our attention because they contain the earliest continuous Old English. The first is one of the two copies of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* which date from within a decade or so of the author's death in 735, the St Petersburg/Leningrad Bede (St Petersburg, Russian National Library, MS Q.v.I.18 [*CLA*, XI.1621]). Made at Wearmouth-Jarrow itself between 731 and 746, it must stand in a very close relationship with Bede's own fair copy. On the lower margin of the page containing the narrative of Cædmon's vision and the Latin account of the words he sang (fol. 107^r), the scribe carefully entered the Old English version, using a smaller version of the same Insular minuscule hand that he used for the main text. We have here the oldest Old English verse extant, the Northumbrian recension of Cædmon's *Hymn*.[70] The second is the Book of Cerne (Cambridge, University Library, MS Ll.1.10). This is an early ninth-century prayerbook for private devotion produced somewhere in the midland reaches of the third, central zone, possibly at Worcester. It is written throughout in an elegant Insular minuscule but fuses texts, decorative styles and iconographic themes drawn from a wide variety of cultural traditions within Britain, Ireland and as far beyond as, ultimately, the eastern Mediterranean, and synthesizes them into a coherent, original creation. It opens with an Old English exhortation to prayer placed by the scribe in order to compose and focus the reader's mind on the religious journey ahead: this is the oldest continuous Old English literary prose.[71] Both manuscripts demonstrate the ease with which eighth- and ninth-century scribes used Insular minuscule interchangeably for Old English and Latin, a 'language-blindness' which persisted until the Benedictine Reform of the tenth century.[72]

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68 Chaplais, 'Letter of Bishop Wealdhere'; Wormald, *Bede and the Conversion of England*.
69 Illustrated in Webster and Backhouse (eds.), *Making of England*, pp. 159–60, nos. 123–4.
70 *HE*, IV.24. See also Arngart (ed.), *Leningrad Bede*; and O'Donnell (ed.), *Cædmon's 'Hymn'*, p. 225.
71 M. Brown, *Book of Cerne*, pp. 65, 129–30. For the earliest documentary use of Old English, also in the early ninth century, see Chapter 2 below, p. 57.
72 Crick, 'English Vernacular Script', pp. 176–8.

Committing Old English to parchment did not begin with either of these manuscripts, however, and this emerging tradition deserves comment. The communities at Wearmouth-Jarrow and Malmesbury each remembered their respective house author for having composed texts in the vernacular. As Bede lay dying, one of his students reported that he had been dictating a translation 'into our mother tongue' of parts of St John's Gospel and excerpts from Isidore of Seville; King Alfred apparently knew of Aldhelm's great reputation as a poet in the vernacular as well as in Latin.[73] Yet the convention certainly predated these two authors for, as we have seen, glossaries reveal that Old English was acquiring a written form by the late seventh century, if only on a word-by-word basis.

So how far back did skill in written English reach? Bede, famously, asserted that King Æthelberht of Kent (d. 616) issued 'a code of laws after the Roman manner . . . written in English' immediately after his conversion by Augustine of Canterbury (*HE*, II.5). Evidently, Bede's eighth-century Canterbury inform-ants knew of written vernacular laws attributed to the first Christian Anglo-Saxon king, but this is not proof that Æthelberht issued such an edict. As preserved in the twelfth-century *Textus Roffensis*, the earliest Kentish laws have orthographic features which may betray Irish influence.[74] In postulating that Anglo-Saxons first learned how to represent their own language in written form in centres where Irish and Anglo-Saxon scholars studied and taught alongside each other, we may need to look to the monasteries in Ireland to which large numbers of Anglo-Saxon students flocked for their education in the central decades of the seventh century. In the multilingual environment of communities such as Mayo 'of the Saxons' (Co. Mayo) and Clonmelsh (Co. Carlow), it might not have been such a leap in the dark to replicate in Old English what the Irish had achieved for their own language two generations or so previously.[75]

The histories of writing in Britain and Ireland are, then, inextricably intertwined. Writing tells a 'joined-up' story that cannot be contained within parameters defined by geography, language, script, religion or ethnicity. It requires that we transcend national narratives and the barriers of language and tradition, and focus instead on techniques, styles and uses, and on the cultural adaptation which they fostered. It provides a graphic illustration of the way in

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73 Cuthbert, *Epistola de obitu Bedae*, *HE*, p. 582; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta pontificum Anglorum*, V.190.

74 Oliver, 'Irish Influence on Orthographic Practice'.

75 *HE*, III.27, IV.4. Discussed by T. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 320, 336–7; and Ó Néill, 'Irish Role'.

which early medieval cultural zones intersected and influenced each other, irrespective of political boundaries, religious affiliations or difficulties of language. It is, then, as a multilingual world that early medieval Britain and Ireland can best be understood. Culturally influential because ideologically potent, and ideologically potent because culturally influential, writing affords a sensitive index to that world's development across the four centuries that transformed the late Roman era into the Middle Ages. The following chapters demonstrate how those patterns of influence, appropriation and creativity were repeatedly refashioned in the writing and literature of the next four centuries, to *c.* 1150.

Chapter 2

The art of writing: scripts and scribal production

JULIA CRICK

The early Anglo-Saxon Church began in the competition between the colonizing ambitions of at least three parties: Roman, Gaelic and Frankish Christians.[1] Although the influence of Rome triumphed and precipitated the English Church into a relationship of institutional and ideological dependency, Gaeldom and Gaul remained potent forces in the cultural history of both the new Church of the English and the nation which later took shape under its influence.[2] Britain was permanently dislocated from the cultural metropolis, Rome, by economy, history and language. As a consequence, for more than half a millennium English writers and copyists found themselves in difficult suspension between different cultural zones, sustained by imports of texts and personnel from a variety of sources, but dependent on the continent for spiritual authority. This is a struggle encapsulated in the history of script. It will have been manifest in the practical and ideological conditions in which each book or document was produced, and elements of it are captured in every specimen preserved for modern scholarly scrutiny. Since the late nineteenth century, at least, the cumulative evidence of manuscripts and palaeography has been used to confirm historiographical models, and to constitute others, particularly concerning cultural production in both Latin and the vernacular in early England.

By the same token, manuscript evidence provides a means to challenge and complicate prevailing orthodoxies.[3] As is well known, the English Church, as a

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1 I wish to record thanks to David Dumville and Julia Smith for their comments on earlier versions of this chapter which prompted revision, correction and rethinking of some portions of the original text. For the early Anglo-Saxon Church, see J. Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*, pp. 69–84. On Frankish interest in the sub-Roman British Church, see Sharpe, 'Late Antique Passion'. See further below, pp. 54, 58–60.

2 On the connection between Church and nation, see Wormald, 'Making of England'.

3 As argued by Dumville, *English Caroline Script*, pp. 156–7.

newly established offshoot of the Roman Church, celebrated the late antiquity of Gregory the Great in the seventh and eighth centuries; later, in the tenth, the ascendant West Saxon dynasty patronized the reformed monasticism of the Carolingian and post-Carolingian Franks. Both sets of influences left their mark on individual English scribes who learned to write the capitals of late antique Rome or the minuscule of the Carolingian court and its satellites, but the totality of the surviving manuscript evidence points in a different direction altogether. Here, possibly more clearly than in any other branch of cultural history, the evidence of script suggests that local, initially Gaelic (and perhaps British), influences proliferated and predominated. English-trained scribes trod their own path but morphologically until the twelfth century the bulk of their output is Insular (that is, deriving from professional traditions practised in Britain and Ireland). Thus the story of cultural indebtedness to the continent first told in Bede's history, later reinforced by the reformers of the tenth century, and since endorsed by modern historians, is strikingly undercut by the history of English script as a whole.

Script pinpoints a scribe's social and cultural location with unswerving precision. Just as human speech reveals an individual's geographical and social origins, education, trajectory in adult life – whether he or she has cultivated or indeed attempted to drop particular influences – so scribes reveal their training and influences with every word they write, even if the combination of features can prove difficult to interpret. Training is paramount. Palaeographers tend to describe scribes approximately, by place of origin – Irish, English, French, Italian, Norman and so forth – but these are labels of convenience and it has been argued that such statements should be understood as identifications of where a scribe was trained to write as much as of his or her nationality.[4] Significantly, in the very complicated circumstances of early and mid-seventh-century Britain, during the establishment of English Christianity, no example of writing by an English scribe has been identified. Anglo-Saxon aristocrats frequently travelled abroad to be educated, women to Frankish monasteries and men to Ireland.[5] It is perfectly feasible, therefore, that any such migrants taught to write abroad would have learned the script of their adoptive homes. Some scholars have argued that Irish schools predominated in seventh-century England, and thus that even in Britain 'the Irish taught the English to write'.[6] Here again, the effect would be to decouple

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4 McKitterick, *Books*, chap. iv, pp. 294–5, 302, 317; O'Sullivan, 'Manuscripts', pp. 511–12.
5 O'Sullivan, 'Manuscripts'; Herren, 'Scholarly Contacts', p. 39; *HE*, iii.8, p. 25, and below, p. 60 note 46.
6 O'Sullivan, 'Manuscripts', p. 511.

training from nationality: an Englishman's hand might look characteristically generically Insular.[7] The matter of training is therefore critical to our understanding of typologies of script and, indeed, of cultural influences more widely in early Anglo-Saxon England.

A second factor influencing the type of script is exemplar.[8] Scribes regularly copied texts written in scripts other than those which they had been trained to write themselves, some of considerable antiquity.[9] On some occasions, at least, this may have caused them to deviate from their usual repertoire of script, by modification or even imitation.[10] Scribes could evoke the splendour of late antiquity or the Carolingian court by writing a universalizing script such as Square capitals or Caroline minuscule, both used for centuries in many corners of the former Roman Empire. In an extraordinary effort of cultural self-effacement the scribes of the Codex Amiatinus, working at Monkwearmouth-Jarrow in the time of Bede, reproduced Roman capital scripts with such flawless fidelity that some scholars have contended they must have been Italian.[11] Certainly there is hardly a detail in the script or the preparation of the writing material to betray an English origin.[12] Such essays were exceptional in early England, however, and may be directly paralleled with the unusual classicism of Bede's Latin. In other circumstances, in the absence of exacting discipline or instruction from a living exponent, provincial experiments are likely to give themselves away. A third factor which determined how the written word was represented on the page was straightforwardly subjective: scribal interpretation. Scribes made decisions all the time about how best to translate to the blank page what they saw in their exemplar as well as what they may have heard in dictation. Whether they ignored or imitated what lay before them, neither choice is a neutral one. Motivation, ideology and aspiration all potentially exerted influence.

The relationship between training, exemplar, and interpretation produced a set of responses which mark the scripts written by English scribes as distinct

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7 *Ibid.*, and O'Sullivan, 'Insular Calligraphy'; on schools, see Herren, 'Scholarly Contacts'.

8 For comment, see J. Brown, 'Tradition, Imitation and Invention' in his *Palaeographer's View*; and McKitterick, *Books*, chap. IV, p. 305.

9 For an Italian Gospel book imported into England before the late seventh century, see Backhouse and Webster (eds.), *Making of England*, pp. 17–19. For lost early libraries, see Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 33–52.

10 For an example, see below, notes 11–12. On the practice of imitation, see J. Brown, *Palaeographer's View*, p. 195; and Crick, 'Script and the Sense of the Past'.

11 E. A. Lowe, 'Key to Bede's Scriptorium', p. 443. See also Parkes, *Scriptorium of Wearmouth-Jarrow*, pp. 94–7.

12 See also Ganz, 'Roman Manuscripts'.

from any progenitors. Their work is indebted to Ireland, Francia, Rome and elsewhere,certainly, but was contained within these traditions for short periods of time and more usually characterized by eclecticism and frequent stylistic innovation, as well as often high standards of calligraphic excellence. Script once again expresses historical processes. Writing in England in these centuries reflects the resolution, more or less successful, of a tension between aspiration and practical need. Scribes acknowledged and paid homage to the religious and cultural superiority of Rome and its other spiritual satellites, but simultaneously they faced the practical realities of exclusion from that world. The Gaels had already learned to deal with cultural distance. Despite, or perhaps because of, their position beyond the periphery of the Roman Empire, they internalized Latin Christianity through a process of absorption. As later in England, Latin had to be learned as a foreign language, and the Gaels imported Christianity on their own terms, customizing its structures, reverencing the patristic inheritance, while constructing their own Latin idiom, and pioneering a new form of script.

For nearly two centuries the political elite of the English-ruled kingdoms had resisted Christianity despite their exposure to its influence. The religion of the indigenous population of the island and of their powerful neighbours overseas, Christianity came in a variety of forms, each bearing complex cultural and political messages, and conversion necessarily entailed a measure of political and cultural subordination. Some documented English converts had spent their formative years abroad, like Sigibert who became king of the East Angles *c*. 630 on return from exile in Francia, or Oswiu of Bernicia (r. 642–70), brought up among the Irish and the Picts (*HE*, III.1, 18), but conversion from Rome cut the Gordian knot of immediate political and personal obligation to neighbouring powers and allowed adherents to submit to a remote authority with unmediated access to the superior technological and ideological resources of the Mediterranean.

The English acquired literacy as an adjunct to Christianization but how exactly they did so is a process which can only be inferred from the content and form of its written remnants. Every step in the process of realizing a text on the page required resources, training and technological expertise, from the preparation of writing materials, to script, to orthography. Where libraries existed, books could be recycled, as the number of palimpsested manuscripts from the continent attests, but no books from Britain's Roman past are known to have survived the wars and institutional discontinuities of sub-Roman times, whether palimpsested or not. It has been suggested that Irish scribes working on the continent were reluctant to erase texts, such was their

reverence for knowledge.[13] Among the English-speaking population of Britain, for whom there was little possibility of direct inheritance of Latin culture – neither antique libraries, nor teachers, nor even residual Latinity – the problems were acute. Neither texts nor script survive, in datable form at least, before the last quarter of the seventh century, after the inception of the schools at Canterbury and Malmesbury and initially in the form of documents rather than books.[14] What is remarkable is that when examples of Insular book production finally appear in the surviving record, more than a century after the arrival of the Roman mission in Kent, they are so accomplished. Whether modern scholars have simply failed to identify the faltering steps, or whether those steps have failed to be preserved, we cannot say.

The question of who taught the English to write and using what materials remains an open one, but script-forms capture the imprint of some at least of the probably formative influences. Three possible trajectories presented themselves: from Rome, from within the Insular tradition, and from Francia.

The Roman experiment

Close engagement with Rome in the century after the Roman mission sent by Gregory the Great in 596 involved wholesale cultural donation from the former Roman world. Throughout the seventh century continental pastors, teachers and craftsmen came to England bringing with them their skills and cultural assumptions. Thus through conversion the English acquired not only Latinity and Latin writing, relics and texts, as had the Gaels, but in addition a transfusion of law and personnel direct from the continent.[15]

Some of this influence finds reflection in script. Indeed, Bischoff even characterized southern England as 'a Roman writing province' until the early eighth century.[16] The first identifiable extant examples of composition and copying by an English hand are charters dating from the 670s.[17] The form and language are imported from Rome, as is the script, but the combination is alien. Continental scribes routinely copied their charters in a descendant of late Roman cursive, the angular inaccessible script of papyrus documents from heathen antiquity

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13 Bischoff, *Manuscripts and Libraries*, pp. 9–10.
14 On the school at Canterbury, see Bischoff and Lapidge (eds.), *Biblical Commentaries*. On that at Malmesbury, see Herren, 'Scholarly Contacts'; and Orchard, *Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, pp. 58, 63–4.
15 Levison, *England and the Continent*, pp. 15–44; Brooks, 'Canterbury'.
16 Quoted in full below, p. 57, note 32.
17 Chaplais, 'Origins and Authenticity'; E. A. Lowe, *English Uncial*, plates xxi–xxiii; D. H. Wright, 'Some Notes', p. 448.

onwards. Early Anglo-Saxon scribes, on the other hand, rejected the entire gamut of Roman secular tradition, from documentary to literary production, and created charters which looked like objects of Christian authority. They found their medium by customizing aspects of specifically Christian book production. They used parchment, not papyrus, and instead of cursive script employed uncials, a form of capital script developed in late antiquity for the copying of Bibles and other high-status texts, suitable for writing on parchment because of its rotundity, and providing an alternative to the Square and Rustic capital scripts used for copying the Roman classics.

Copyists in England belonged to a different cultural world from that of the continent, and this irreducible difference finds reflection in script.[18] Sometimes, as the new rendering of documentary form suggests, they resolved the difference by innovation; sometimes more conventional attempts to bridge the gap simply failed. An example of thwarted palaeographical ambition is evident in the Rustic capitals in the eighth-century Vespasian Psalter, which reproduce the letter-forms and closely packed words of their classical progenitor, but which have lost the elegance and lightness which characterize that script.[19] Uncials, the latest and most Christian of the three Roman majuscule scripts, carried particular cultural messages, and they were adapted for use in England more successfully. The American palaeographer E. A. Lowe argued that English scribes in some centres, especially Canterbury, learned the form specifically in use a century earlier in Gregorian Rome,[20] thus practising a kind of archaism in keeping with the reverence for Rome seen elsewhere.[21] Rosamond McKitterick has contended that the degree of indebtedness to Rome has been overplayed, suggesting that Frankish models may lie behind some English essays in uncials.[22] In Francia, post-Roman scribes cultivated the script arguably in a continuous tradition less explicitly indebted to Gregorian Rome than that followed in Anglo-Saxon England, but the possibility of non-Roman models does not negate the associations of the script. Frankish scribes, like their English counterparts, treated uncials as a special script and both used them for a narrower and more solemn range of purposes than their Italian contemporaries.[23]

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18 McKitterick has speculated that Echternach charters might have been written in uncials but no evidence of the practice survives (*Books*, chap. v, p. 374).
19 London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian A.i, fol. 141^v (*CLA*, II.193); J. Roberts, *Guide to Scripts*, plate 2b.
20 E. A. Lowe, *English Uncial*, p. 9; see also D. H. Wright, 'Some Notes', pp. 450–2, 455–6.
21 Above, p. 54, note 15.
22 McKitterick, *Books*, chap. IV, p. 293, chap. v, p. 380.
23 Bischoff, *Manuscripts and Libraries*, p. 44; McKitterick, *Books*, chap. VI, pp. 1–15.

The tradition of writing uncial appears to have been practised in diverse parts of Anglo-Saxon England, though the likelihood is that only a limited number of centres used it as a bookhand. Celtic scribes eschewed it, although William O'Sullivan has argued that it may have influenced the morphology of the more formal grades of Insular script.[24] Uncial charters survive from Canterbury (St Augustine's), the kingdom of the East Saxons (Barking or St Paul's, London) and Worcester, and perfect, or near-perfect, imitation of uncials can be associated with Monkwearmouth-Jarrow. Other specimens have been localized by reference to these examples.[25] An uncial copy of the Benedictine Rule (Oxford, Bodleian Hatton 48 [*CLA*, II.240]) – has been associated with Worcester, for example. At an unknown English centre, possibly Worcester, a fifth-century Italian uncial manuscript of Jerome's commentary on Ecclesiastes was patched by the addition of six replacement leaves supplied in uncials written by an English scribe. The manuscript bears an Old English *ex libris* recording the ownership of Abbess Cuthswith, now identified as the abbess of Inkberrow, near Worcester.[26]

What is not in doubt is that this period of English indebtedness to Roman models ended quickly, perhaps lasting less than a century. There is no evidence that uncial was used as a text-script in England after the end of the eighth century. It lived on as a subordinate component within a hierarchy of scripts, occupying the top rank as a display script but in mixed company and so transplanted from its late antique origins as a text hand.[27] Just as papal involvement in Anglo-Saxon England is never so well documented after the time of Bede, so the scribal connection seems never to have been replenished. The founding moment, Gregorian Rome, remains apparently fossilized in the history of English script.

Insular training

On the continent Church leaders could preach in Latin and expect to be understood by their congregations, at least until the eighth century; in England, on the other hand, the spoken word was permanently divorced from the universal written language. The early Anglo-Saxons certainly

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24 O'Sullivan, 'Manuscripts', pp. 517–18.

25 On Monkwearmouth-Jarrow: Parkes, *Scriptorium of Wearmouth-Jarrow*; on the charters: Backhouse and Webster (eds.), *Making of England*, nos. 27–8, pp. 43–5. Above, p. 54, note 17.

26 *CLA*, IX.1430a, 1430b; E. A. Lowe, *English Uncial*, plate 1b; Sims-Williams, 'Cuthswith'.

27 The same hierarchy seen in centres on the continent, including those with Insular connections, is discussed by Ganz, 'Text and Scripts', pp. 186, 193–4; and McKitterick, *Books*, chap. VII, p. 16.

encountered indigenous Christian traditions and with them presumably Latinity in Britain.[28] Structures of literacy and Latinity derived from a native Christian tradition surviving on the western edge of Britain in the remnants of a sub-Roman Church, and cults were actively propagated at Christian shrines even in eastern England, but by the sixth and seventh centuries, when the ruling English dynasties enter the historical record, the evidence for indigenous Latin is only to be seen in areas beyond the control of English-speaking elites, in the monumental inscriptions of western Britain which suggest that Latin continued there as a spoken language.[29] In eastern Britain, however, the engagement between spoken language and the written word took longer. Connected prose in English is seen in the early ninth century in a group of aristocratic grants composed entirely in the vernacular in favour of the church of Christ Church Canterbury.[30] Here, as in the first charters of the 670s, English scribes innovated in order to document the material needs of the Church. By the later tenth century written English fulfilled some of the earlier pastoral functions of Latin on the continent, not least in the form of homilies in which pastors addressed their flocks in their native language (see Chapter 22 below). Here, in the acquisition of vernacular literacy, the English owed a double debt to the Gaels. As the first to confront Latin literacy in an area with no Roman inheritance, the Gaels had learned to bridge the cultural gap, pioneering manuscript production and acquiring Latinity in parallel. How they did this resides in largely invisible processes but the fact that English and Gaelic scribes perpetuated obsolete methods for the preparation of parchment, some not in use on the continent since late antiquity, indicates that some inheritance from practices learned in sub-Roman Britain is possible.[31]

Bischoff described the ending of the period of English subordination to Rome and the advent of Irish influence as a sequence with regional implications: 'The South of England long remained a Roman writing province. Only in the first decades of the eighth century did it absorb the more economical Insular script, which was being propagated from Northumbria, and also perhaps from Malmesbury, where it has arrived with the Irish.'[32] In the course of the eighth

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28 T. Charles-Edwards, 'Context and Uses of Literacy', esp. pp. 62–4; Sharpe, 'Naming of Bishop Ithamar'.

29 T. Charles-Edwards, 'Context and Uses of Literacy'.

30 Crick, 'English Vernacular Script', pp. 177–8. On the scribes, all of whom also wrote Latin, see Brooks, *Early History*, pp. 168–71, 360–1, note 70 (Scribes 3–7). The hand of Scribe 4 is illustrated in J. Roberts, *Guide to Scripts*, plate 3. For another roughly contemporary example of English prose, see M. Brown, *Book of Cerne*, pp. 129–30.

31 J. Brown, *Palaeographer's View*, p. 195; O'Sullivan, 'Manuscripts', p. 515.

32 Bischoff, *Manuscripts and Libraries*, p. 14.

century, perhaps by mid-century, all English centres adopted the system of minuscule scripts perfected by Insular scribes. One early example, the letter addressed by Waldhari (Wealdhere), bishop of London, to Archbishop Brihtwold of Canterbury in 704 or 705, the first datable English example of the characteristic minuscule bookhand of Britain and Ireland in the early Middle Ages, shows no obvious trace of Roman or Frankish ancestry.[33] How long such scripts had been written in Britain rather than Ireland remains disputed, and O'Sullivan would extend the period of Irish tutelage of the English much further back in time.[34] Given the history of Irish Christianity in both islands it is likely that the script owed its ultimate origins to a descendant of Roman script written in Britain.[35] Literate Irishmen were present in sub-Roman Britain, even in the eastern parts, as indicated by their missionary endeavours both north and south of the river Humber since the later sixth century at the latest; later Ireland served as a training ground for English churchmen and aristocrats in the seventh century when Englishmen learned to read and possibly to write there before leaving to continue their careers elsewhere.[36] O'Sullivan has even postulated that script written by English scribes was probably indistinguishable from Irish work until the early eighth century. In this case early experiments in writing would be buried in a much larger corpus of palaeographical material which cannot be closely dated or localized.

However fraught the controversies about the origins of the script and, in particular, individual manuscripts, it remains the case that English script from the eighth century to the twelfth took its letter-forms, morphology and much of the systems of abbreviation and punctuation from a series of scripts in use by the Gaels by the seventh century at the latest.[37] By upgrading lowly forms of script to new calligraphic standards, a practice documented in a variety of apparently unconnected contexts across Europe, Insular scribes created book-hands which could be written with greater speed and lateral compression than capital scripts.[38] Insular scribes used minuscule rather than capital scripts as the carrier of text and – also by experimenting with abbreviation and

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33 Chaplais, 'Letter of Bishop Wealdhere', plate 1; O'Sullivan, 'Manuscripts', p. 512.
34 O'Sullivan, 'Manuscripts', esp. p. 512. The antiquity of Irish literacy has been argued by Harvey, 'Latin, Literacy and the Celtic Vernaculars'.
35 J. Brown, 'The Oldest Irish Manuscripts' in his *Palaeographer's View*; O'Sullivan, 'Manuscripts', pp. 517–20, 547–8.
36 J. Campbell, 'Debt of the Early English Church'; Herren, 'Scholarly Contacts'; O'Sullivan, 'Manuscripts', pp. 511–15.
37 Described by J. Brown, 'The Irish Element in the Insular System of Scripts' in his *Palaeographer's View*.
38 O'Sullivan, 'Manuscripts', p. 522; Ganz, 'Text and Scripts', p. 189.

ligatures – improved the speed and compression of copying. The repertoire of scripts diverged after the eighth century, and English scribes refined and extended it in new directions, in particular exploring the calligraphic potential of lower grades of minuscule. Even in the tenth century when a new compartmentalized and flat-topped form of Insular script started to proliferate, known to modern scholarship as English Square minuscule, the inheritance of letter-forms and some abbreviations is still evident. Indeed, it has been argued that the flat-topped appearance of this script may owe something to developments in contemporary Wales and elsewhere in western and northern Britain.[39] Square minuscule mutated into a rounder and very widely written script in the eleventh century, the Insular minuscule used for the production of Old English script, and this continued to be written, or sometimes imitated, at a smaller number of centres after the Norman Conquest of England, although the rotundity was usually tempered by the bristly spikiness seen in Norman hands and their Anglo-Norman progeny.[40]

Francia: the Carolingian moment

This brings us to Francia. In palaeographical terms the Franks are the silent partners in the English conversion process. In the tussle between Romanizing capitals and Insular minuscule the Franks disappear from view. Despite the role of the Franks in the conversion of England, not least in providing translators, bishops and Latin writers, the palaeographical traces of Frankish influence are not obvious.[41] It was only in the tenth century that English scribes regularly wrote a form of script developed in Francia and thus could be viewed as now affiliated to a Frankish script-province.

For the conversion period, Frankish influence has been detected in areas of the region south of the Humber but only in particular localities and in specific circumstances. In other words we do not see sustained palaeographical evidence that Franks were involved in training scribes in the new English Church. McKitterick has suggested that some of the exemplars of English uncial were Frankish rather than Roman, reversing the direction of influence suggested by some earlier commentators.[42] The evidence is certainly susceptible of more than one interpretation. Some examples of English uncial display

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39 Dumville, 'English Square Minuscule Script: The Background', pp. 151, 159–61.
40 Ker, *English Manuscripts*.
41 Sims-Williams, 'Continental Influence'; Fouracre, 'Agilbert (d. 679x90)', *ODNB*; Thacker, 'St Wilfred (*c*. 634–709/10)', *ODNB*.
42 McKitterick, *Books*, chap. v, p. 380; *contra* D. H. Wright, 'Some Notes', p. 450.

characteristics of Frankish uncials, notably the square aspect and tall capital *L*, but many of the specimens identified by Lowe as displaying English symptoms may have been written in continental centres.[43] McKitterick has drawn attention to examples of other scripts which suggest mixed Frankish and Insular influence, however, and she has explained the anomalous admixture of features found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 140 (*CLA*, II.237) as perhaps the work of a Frank stationed in Wessex who had attempted to learn Insular script.[44]

Without doubt Frankish- and English-trained scribes, most apparently hailing from continental centres, worked alongside each other in many manuscripts.[45] Bede reports that English noblewomen travelled to the Seineland nunneries of Jouarre and Chelles to be educated (*HE*, III.8, p. 25); some may have learned to write there, although the script of those centres shows Insular influence which suggests that the nunneries housed some already trained to write in England, whether teachers or novices.[46] Despite the evidence for significant contact, particularly in the first generations after conversion, it is hard to escape from the impression that exposure to Frankish influence on a number of fronts left limited, or perhaps simply subtle, changes. Despite being a trading partner and close Christian neighbour of the Franks, despite the Frankish role in the process of Christianization in the greater Thames estuary zone (Frankish preachers and missionaries are attested from Dorchester-on-Thames to the river Deben), the English give the impression of intellectual and educational separation from the Franks before the later ninth century.

The evidence of script serves to reinforce this interpretation. The primary script of the early medieval English was Insular minuscule, a variant of the script written by the Britons and Gaels; the major display scripts, capital scripts, are of antique, and so ultimately Roman, origin. Palaeographical influence from Francia, where detectable at all, takes the form of modifications to these two primary scripts. O'Sullivan noted that the English and Gaelic versions of Insular script began to part company after the early eighth century when the proportions of Northumbrian minuscule changed, showing a compression and an elongation of proportions (specifically the extending of the descending strokes of *f*, *p*, *r* and *s*), which he attributed to Merovingian-

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43 E. A. Lowe, *English Uncial*, plates XX, XXIX, XXX. On the symptoms, see McKitterick, *Books*, chap. V, p. 378.
44 McKitterick, *Books*, chap. III, pp. 420–1.
45 Ganz, *Corbie*, pp. 129–30; McKitterick, *Books*, chap. VI, pp. 302–15.
46 McKitterick, *Books*, chap. VII, pp. 25–7; on the script in general, see Bischoff, *Mittelalterliche Studien*, vol. I, pp. 16–34.

period influence from Francia.[47] Comparable stylistic influence from across the English Channel may be discernible a century later in Kent. Michelle Brown has proposed the attractive hypothesis that the development of a reformed and calligraphic 'mannered minuscule' script at Canterbury in the early ninth century in the pontificate of Archbishop Wulfred (805–32) might reflect 'similar developments in the use of minuscule in the Carolingian orbit'.[48] Certainly, we see a slowed down, more compartmentalized form of script, both features associated with Caroline minuscule, the script developed at the Frankish imperial court in the later eighth century under the aegis of the newly elevated royal dynasty, the descendants of Charles Martel, the so-called Carolingians. There was a strong correlation between political aspiration and engagement with the Carolingian world in eighth- and ninth-century England. Wulfred's Canterbury, resisting the attentions of the Mercian over-king, was reformed in tandem with continental ideals of clerical discipline inspired by the Rule of Chrodegang of Metz.[49] Both the Mercians and the West Saxons, who finally robbed them of their hegemony over the wealthy southern kingdoms after 828, showed strong Carolingian influence in their mode of rule.

The visible expression of this cultural, economic and dynastic entente was curiously delayed, however, at least to judge from script. English scribes did not adopt Frankish script – Caroline minuscule – until the middle and later tenth century and only then after a long period of cultural upheaval. In the second half of the ninth century English book production experienced a rupture – a breakdown of the old system of scripts which had prevailed since the seventh century – and, half a century later, the emergence of Square minuscule, a reformed type of Insular script whose influences included native ones – Late Celtic Reformed minuscule and older English script – and perhaps some subtle influence from the continent.[50] What occasioned the change is a matter for debate, as will be discussed below, but the fact of the change signals processes which merit investigation. Historians of material culture have observed that changes in decorative style often accompany major ideological or political realignments, as in changes to Anglo-Saxon metalwork accompanying the conversion to Christianity or, indeed, a new decorative language observed at the court of Alfred the Great.[51] Likewise a 'script revolution' accompanied the programme of educational and religious reform

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47 O'Sullivan, 'Manuscripts', pp. 514–15.
48 M. Brown, 'House Style', p. 146. On the developments, see Ganz, 'Preconditions'.
49 Brooks, *Early History*, pp. 155–60, 175–97.
50 Dumville, 'English Script'.
51 Webster, 'Encrypted Visions', p. 20; Pratt, 'Persuasion and Invention'.
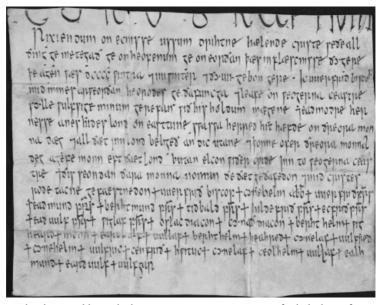
associated with the Carolingian dynasty, when not only were the idiosyncratic and densely written variants of Merovingian-period minuscule superseded by the clear, open and simple modules of Caroline minuscule but capital scripts were deployed in new ways, for display rather than for the writing of texts.[52] The palaeographical change which emerges in reformed circles connected with the courts of Alfred's descendants as kings of Wessex and later England was not in fact a script revolution of the magnitude of that witnessed at the Carolingian court, rather a distillation of processes and influences, some of which had been at work for some decades (see Figure 2.1). One component of the new style, for example, stems back a century or more: the reduction of the multiple grades of English minuscule to one set type of script, written deliberately with the pen lifted between individual strokes (rather than creating the linking strokes or ligatures which characterize the more cursive grades of earlier Insular minuscule and pre-Caroline script on the continent), which

2.1 British Library Additional Charter 19791 (Sawyer 1281). Wærferth, bishop of Worcester, leases lands to his reeve, at Aston Magna, Gloucestershire, in AD 904. This document illustrates the need for, and presumably the functioning of, an episcopal bureaucracy. The separation of strokes which characterizes the script marks the transition from the fluency of earlier Insular minuscule to the later compartmentalization of Square minuscule.

52 McKitterick, *Books*, chap. VI, p. 5.

can be seen in Canterbury script of the ninth century. The new script, known to modern scholars as English Square minuscule, was adopted by the court, as is demonstrated by its repeated reinterpretation at the hands of royal scribes in the first two thirds of the tenth century, and throughout the tenth century was used for the writing of a variety of Latin and Old English texts.[53]

The first signs of a radical break with Insular tradition come in the middle years of the tenth century. In that decade we see English scribes deliberately abandoning their native script. The evidence is confined to the writing of Latin and is primarily associated with the copying of texts which enshrine radical ideas about the conduct of the religious life and so themselves attest a new openness to continental Benedictine tradition. In the 960s a hybrid script appears, in which Caroline letter-forms infiltrate the writing of Insular script.[54] Roughly simultaneously, English scribes in a restricted number of centres – notably Canterbury, Abingdon, Winchester and Worcester – began to write the reformed Carolingian script known as Caroline minuscule.[55] Thus the evidence of script attests that Insular traditions were challenged and, in some places, for the first time since the seventh century, actually overwhelmed by influences from the continent.

Although Insular minuscule continued to be written in England alongside Caroline in the next century, the shift from an Insular to a continental (Frankish) centre of gravity proved irreversible in England. Caroline script was used for writing Latin rather than the vernacular, a distinction marked in royal documents in which the Latin text was written in Caroline and the vernacular boundary statement copied in a distinctively spidery version of Square minuscule. By the second decade of the eleventh century Insular minuscule ceased to be used for the writing of Latin and the connection between the letter-forms characteristic of the Insular script tradition and writing in the vernacular was sealed.[56] Meanwhile, the use of Caroline minuscule in England signalled not only Latin writing, but a conscious connection with continental monasticism which was renewed as the seat of monastic influence itself shifted. Thus, the script of Fleury and central France influenced early English essays in Caroline minuscule in the tenth century;[57] that of Flanders and the Pas de Calais influenced the dominant style of English

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53 As argued by Dumville, 'English Square Minuscule Script: The Mid-Century Phases', pp. 156–64.
54 *Ibid.*, pp. 151–6.
55 Bishop, *English Caroline Minuscule*, pp. xiv–xv; Dumville, *English Caroline Script*.
56 Dumville, *English Caroline Script*, pp. 18–19.
57 Bishop, *English Caroline Minuscule*, p. xii, note 2; Dumville, *English Caroline Script*, p. 143.

Caroline script in the second quarter of the eleventh century, practised at Canterbury and later at Exeter; and the distinctively bristly script of Norman Benedictine monasteries fused with rounder English Caroline to create a new vehicle for Latin writing after the Norman Conquest.[58] In each phase it is historically and palaeographically conceivable, even probable, that Caroline was learned not simply by the imitation of exemplars, but from continental teachers, whether the script was learned at home or abroad.[59]

Frankish reformed centres and Frankish masters exerted a profound influence on Anglo-Latin script in the century before the Norman Conquest. There is evidence that Caroline minuscule had influenced writing in England for perhaps a century and a half before English scribes in some centres learned to write it, but the decision to suspend some native traditions and to conform to the script of Frankish reform suggests surrender to a new set of influences and practices. Indeed, it bespeaks a period of spiritual tutelage comparable in intensity and duration to Gaelic influence in the conversion period, but localized in its effect because it was an adjunct. Scribes wrote both Caroline and Insular minuscule. Only after the Norman Conquest are we able to identify centres which practised Caroline minuscule exclusively, but in most major and very many minor centres Old English was written and hence a transformed version of Insular minuscule was practised.[60]

Irish cultural history in the tenth and eleventh centuries offers an enlightening contrast with conditions in contemporary Anglo-Saxon England. Viking attacks affected institutions of learning on much of the Atlantic seaboard of western Europe from Aquitaine to Ireland and north-west Britain. Lands whose profits might have sustained monastic learning were encroached on in wartime by armies, by new settlers in parts of north Britain, Ireland, Wales and England, and by the native elite, and there is widespread evidence that religious communities were displaced, books stolen and archives burned. In Ireland the destruction of books appears to have been so wholesale that few Hiberno-Latin texts survive in Irish manuscripts and few early Irish manuscripts have enjoyed a continuous history in Ireland unless locked away or preserved in shrines.[61] In midland and Northumbrian England the archives of monasteries were lost, for the most part, together with many books, and Latin texts composed in Northumbria, like those written in Ireland, survive thanks

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58 Dumville, *English Caroline Script*, pp. 116–40, 150–1.
59 As argued for Canterbury by Dumville, *ibid*., pp. 92–4.
60 See Ker, *Catalogue*; also Da Rold *et al*., *Production and Use of English Manuscripts*.
61 T. Charles-Edwards, 'Context and Uses of Literacy', p. 62; O'Sullivan, 'Manuscripts', pp. 511, 538; Herbert, 'Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries', p. 98.

to copies preserved on the continent. Religious communities were likewise destroyed or displaced, although isolated examples of survival can be identified, as exemplified by the Durham *Liber vitae*, which is said to have remained in the possession of the displaced community which owned it.[62]

On both sides of the Irish Sea, in England and Ireland, programmes of vernacular instruction were undertaken to extend the reach of the written word beyond those who could comprehend Latin, the clear implication being that Latin was not adequate as a means of communication in the tenth century and, by extension, that its utility had declined.[63] In England in the early tenth century, as in Celtic Britain and Ireland in the ninth and Ireland in the mid-ninth, Insular script was reformed. In the English context the old letter-forms were pressed into service again as the simplified and clarified type of script known to palaeographers as English Square minuscule, practised at the political centre by royal scribes. Brittonic and Gaelic intellectual influences remained vigorous in the tenth century, and books from both cultures fell into the possession of English centres.[64]

In England, at least, the decision to abandon centuries of Insular tradition and to follow the script of the Franks for Latin represents the visual expression of a profound, deliberate and eventually permanent cultural realignment, marking a turn to the east. Continental texts had of course shaped English religious life for centuries but the adoption of continental script was a new development, reinforced repeatedly over succeeding centuries by the influx of new texts and new ecclesiastics from abroad. This created a situation quite different from that reported in Ireland where, in the tenth century, intellectuals had to look to local resources to reconstruct scholarly life.[65] The situation in Wales looks different again, and these differences are instructive. Intellectual traditions fared rather better there in the ninth century, possibly better than in most of England, and there is some limited evidence that Welsh centres were in contact with Francia at this time.[66] A copy of Smaragdus' Commentary on the Benedictine Rule which reached England in the tenth century offers particularly intriguing testimony. It displays clear Welsh symptoms (spelling, abbreviations, the Insular preparation of parchment) which suggest that it was copied in a

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62 Backhouse and Webster (eds.), *Making of England*, p. 132, no. 97.
63 On England, see Chapter 22 below; on Ireland, see Herbert, 'Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries', pp. 91–7.
64 Dumville, *Liturgy*, pp. 111–19, and *English Caroline Script*, p. 97; Godden, 'Asser'; Bishop, 'Early Example', pp. 399–400.
65 Herbert, 'Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries', pp. 97–101.
66 Godden, 'Asser'; below, note 67.

western British, presumably Welsh context, or by someone trained in that context. Its contents, however, a ninth-century Carolingian commentary on the reformers' central text, indicate contact with continental Benedictinism, and it was written in a hybrid script which clearly bears the mark of Caroline minuscule.[67] Exactly how and where such influences met is unknown, but the manuscript attests exposure to continental influence. Welsh churches adopted neither Benedictine monasticism nor Caroline minuscule until after the Norman Conquest of the later eleventh century; their adherence to native traditions throws into focus the radical nature of developments in England where both innovations were successfully imported in the tenth.

Scribes and centres

The question of who did the writing and in what institutional context remains a controversial one. We should entertain a variety of models, from the well-resourced and sophisticated institutional centre (royal or ecclesiastical), to episcopal and clerical entourages, to backwaters where script was imitated awkwardly and with difficulty, to scholars writing apparently privately. The great bulk of our evidence, in the form of both books and documents, cannot be assigned to known locations except by analogy with the small proportion of dated and datable examples, and, in particular, by comparison with known hotspots of scribal activity at certain monastic and episcopal centres. Modern palaeographers have identified such centres by skilful analysis of the output of individual scribes, by analysis of apparently localized types of script, or by a mixture of the two. Thus we can observe the work of charter scribes at Christ Church Canterbury in the first third of the ninth, or the copying of books at the same centre in the third quarter of the tenth century, or the production of books and documents for the new cathedral libraries of Exeter in the 1050s and 1060s, or at Salisbury in the last quarter of the eleventh century and first half of the twelfth.[68] Multiple collaborating scribes worked in such centres – often a dozen or more, but as many as twenty in the case of tenth-century Canterbury.[69] Identification of localizable script types has made it possible

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67 Cambridge, University Library, MS Ee.2.4: Bishop, *English Caroline Minuscule*, no. 3 and plate II, and 'Early Example'; Dumville posits an English origin, in *English Caroline Script*, pp. 97–8 and plate II.
68 Above, note 3. On tenth-century Canterbury, see Dumville, *English Caroline Script*, pp. 86–110; Bishop, 'Notes, Part IV', 'Notes, Part V', 'Notes, Part VI', 'Notes, Part VII'; Drage, 'Bishop Leofric'; and Webber, *Scribes and Scholars*, pp. 8–30.
69 Bishop, 'Notes, Part VII'; Keynes, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 14, plate XIV.

to analyse scribal production for a generation or so at Monkwearmouth-Jarrow in the second quarter of the eighth century, or at Canterbury and Rochester after the Norman Conquest, at a time when they were experimenting with new styles or forging a new idiom.[70]

Most of these centres produced a characteristic style of script but they are exceptional in this; in only a handful of centres in England before the Norman Conquest can we identify scribes trained to write in a detectable house style. Neil Ker, in his catalogue of manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon, warned that 'The existence of special types of writing should not be assumed lightly. It requires a high degree of organization in a scriptorium.'[71] Malcolm Parkes, in his recently published Lyell lectures, noted that 'Organized copying is a historical phenomenon, and often had a short life . . . it was a response to the need to build up the collections of the community but scribal activity in a house declined once its immediate needs had been fulfilled.'[72] Campaigns of construction, restitution or renewal were indeed undertaken at all the centres which produced a distinctive script type in early England: the frontier centres at Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, Exeter and Salisbury; Canterbury at various points in its history, after the loss or destruction of its archive in or before 798, and in the later tenth century when it served as the entry point for continental influence; and after the Norman Conquest.[73] But if 'organized copying' is the exception, what is the rule?

The collective activity of scribes is often said to constitute, or take place within, a scriptorium, but this label is applied with little precision and can be attached to any centre of scribal production. Indeed, the centres just described belong to a variety of institutional types: cathedral communities staffed by secular clergy such as at Wulfredian Canterbury,[74] Exeter and Salisbury; and production by monks, as at Bedan Wearmouth-Jarrow, and in the newly reformed Benedictine communities at Christ Church Canterbury in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Only the last two could claim to be Benedictine foundations. By contrast we have a plethora of unlocalizable manuscripts, or centres whose purported products betray little physical or stylistic interrelationship.[75] In part this situation conforms to a wider European pattern: in the intellectual centres of Italy and Gaul, uniform styles of script constitute

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70 Above, notes 11, 40.
71 Ker, *Catalogue*, p. lvii.
72 Parkes, *Their Hands before Our Eyes*, pp. 8–9.
73 Brooks, *Early History*, pp. 121–2, 228–31.
74 *Ibid*., pp. 155–74.
75 Crick, 'English Vernacular Script', pp. 184–5.

exceptions to the norm before the middle of the eighth century.[76] It also reflects the nature of the religious life. In the limited number of institutions whose members lived according to the Rule of St Benedict, that is, in certain southern English monasteries and nunneries from the last quarter of the tenth century, we can safely say that personal mobility was restricted. Elsewhere, and in earlier times, however, there is plenty of evidence for movement outside and between institutions. This is how scholars understand the admixture of influences seen in continental houses (above, note 45), and O'Sullivan used the argument of scribal mobility to dismantle Julian Brown's construction of a scriptorium at Lindisfarne which produced the Lindisfarne Gospels in the eighth century.[77] Indeed, of nearly two dozen scribes surviving from pre-Conquest England, none of those who declare their rank is simply a monk. The self-identifying scribes, all male, include one abbot, two priests, two deacons and four bishops, all of whom would have needed to be mobile by virtue of their ecclesiastical rank.[78]

Bishops and their entourages had a particularly close association with the production of books and documents, in their own right and also by virtue of their association with kings (see Figure 2.1 above). Bishop Asser, in his *Life of King Alfred*, described how he prepared a quire of parchment in order to copy some passages which had pleased the king: 'When I heard his reply I was delighted, and quickly prepared a quire for the purpose and copied the passage near the quire's beginning.'[79] The resulting booklet must have been the second in the king's possession, because Asser recounts at the start of the chapter how the king owned a commonplace book, 'which he constantly carried on his person, and in which were written the day-time offices and some psalms and certain prayers which he had learned in his youth'. Asser's story provides a powerful alternative model for the production of writing – mobile, informal, even ephemeral – to set alongside the prevailing institutional one. The royal devotional materials which he described stood little chance of survival in the long term, subject as they would have been to wear, tear and loss given royal itinerary, destined for obsolescence given the personal nature of its contents.[80]

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76 Bischoff lists Luxeuil, Bobbio, Corbie, Tours and Verona as exceptions and Reims and Lyons as possible exceptions (*Manuscripts and Libraries*, p. 20).
77 O'Sullivan, 'Lindisfarne Scriptorium'.
78 'Scribe', Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England (PASE), www.pase.ac.uk, accessed 20 January 2009. Most examples have been discussed by Gameson in *The Scribe Speaks*. The evidence is difficult to interpret because it is impossible to assess the significance of the declaration of a style and to guess the rank of the unstyled scribes.
79 Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ed. Stevenson, pp. 99–100.
80 See the analogous discussion in Dumville, *Liturgy*, pp. 89–90.
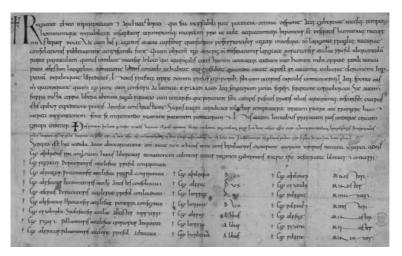
Court production is already well established as a model for the tenth century. It has long been recognized that a series of royal diplomas issued in the name of King Edgar were written by a single scribe, known to scholarship as Edgar A.[81] It has been suggested that he was a bishop, Æthelwold of Winchester, in which case he could have worked at court or at the monastery of Abingdon, where he was abbot. Three other bishops have been associated with the drafting of royal charters – Bishop Cenwald of Worcester (928x929–957/8), Archbishop Dunstan (959–88) and Bishop Giso of Wells (1060–88), a former royal clerk[82] – although it is unknown whether they acted as copyists and where their texts were produced.[83] Certain bishops were licensed to create charters on their own account[84] (see Figure 2.2), and there is evidence of devolution of royal powers to Glastonbury, seat of Archbishop Dunstan.[85]

However eloquent the surviving evidence, we have to face the reality that a sizeable proportion of cultural production in late Anglo-Saxon England cannot

2.2 Harley Charter 43.C.7 (Sawyer 1379). Æscwig, bishop of Dorchester, grants five hides at Cuxham, Oxfordshire, to his man Ælfstan, AD 995 (for 994). This charter reproduces the royal diploma form but the king's place as issuing authority is supplanted by the bishop. The Latin text is written in a hybrid script which shows the influence of Caroline minuscule while the vernacular description of the estate boundaries is written in smaller Insular minuscule.

81 Drögereit, 'Königskanzlei'; Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, pp. 70–9.
82 S. Kelly (ed.), *Charters of Abingdon*, pp. lxxv–lxxvi, cxv–cxxix.
83 Dumville, *Liturgy*, pp. 141–6.
84 Crick (ed.), *Charters*, pp. 165–6 and plate 3.
85 Keynes, 'Dunstan B Charters'.

be mapped. The production of manuscripts in the century before the Norman Conquest is voluminous, yet it comes from contexts which are largely unrecorded. The situation is particularly acute for vernacular manuscripts. The tally of Old English prose texts listed in *A Plan for a Dictionary of Old English* some forty years ago was over 940.[86] Most are anonymous; most survive in some form datable between 950 and 1150, but in unknown contexts, and neither is their means of transmission understood. Two recent major studies of scribal output in the vernacular document the same enigmatic energy. Peter Stokes has identified 464 scribes working in the short half-century from the 990s to Cnut's death in 1035.[87] Donald Scragg lists more than one thousand scribes writing Old English between the late tenth century and *c.* 1100.[88] Again, much of this evidence comes from untraceable contexts. Stokes noted the great diversity of practice at individual centres and in individual manuscripts and he, despite meticulous study, was unable to localize two thirds of his material.[89] Professor Scragg's list of scribes contains a higher proportion of attributions of place of origin or provenance, but even so more than half lack secure indications of context or are entirely without medieval provenance.

The significance of this absence of information is brought home by the palaeographical complexity which characterizes the period. Palaeographers deal with unprovenanced material all the time but they make sense of it by a quasi-archaeological process: establishing typologies, then dating the typologies stratigraphically. For the early eleventh century the diversity of the script is such that Ker, the acknowledged master of the subject, was unable to offer a workable taxonomy and thus had to suspend the process of dating and localizing.[90] This disorientation is significant. What confounded him was the sheer diversity of practice. Manuscripts purportedly hailing from the same centres contain a great variety of script styles; even within the same manuscript different scribal traditions were at work. At Worcester, for example, some scribes adhere to a recognizable style but they constitute a minority.[91] The explosion of writing in the vernacular in the eleventh century, especially informal and ugly writing, defies classification to an unusual degree. While

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86 A. Cameron, 'List of Old English Texts'.
87 Stokes, 'English Vernacular Script'.
88 Scragg, *Conspectus*.
89 He lists a dozen centres with a single surviving example of vernacular writing, and half a dozen others with multiple examples, the largest of which, as we might expect, is Christ Church Canterbury. The total of localized material amounts to 64 in his corpus of 178 MSS.
90 Ker *apud* Whitelock (ed.), *Will of Æthelgifu*, pp. 45–6.
91 Crick, 'English Vernacular Script', p. 184.

there are undoubted moments of calligraphic attainment, much of eleventh-century script is uncalligraphic, disorderly and resistant to classification, and this in itself seems new and significant. It also suggests that some scribes operated in contexts markedly different from those which prevailed in earlier centuries, individuals possibly enjoying greater mobility in their own careers, within and even outside a diverse range of institutional arrangements, some having received rigorous training but others apparently working under relatively relaxed scribal discipline.[92]

Conclusions

Although some English scribes in the seventh and eighth centuries emulated antique script with remarkable precision, and others in the tenth and eleventh adopted the script of reformed monasticism, for most purposes English scribes used an indigenous script, which mutated into higher or lower grades of formality as circumstances dictated, and which became the carrier for written English. The origins of this script are disputed but probably lie in Britain, via the mediation of the Gaels, whose negotiation with antiquity had been achieved a century or more before England's. The morphology of early medieval Insular script (before the Viking Age) follows a path unique in western Europe. It appears to develop out of late Roman script, and variants of the same forms are written on both sides of the Irish Sea from the seventh century to at least the twelfth. Indeed, the continental tradition proved inadequate for the needs of the early English Church because it presupposed comprehension of Latin. The Irish, who had pioneered bilingual education and developed post-Roman scribal traditions, influenced the English, although the main evidence we have for this is palaeographical: Insular minuscule has a continuous history from the seventh century, and out of it English vernacular minuscule emerges in the eleventh. Meanwhile English scribes flirted with ideologically freighted continental script types: Roman uncial and later Caroline minuscule. Neither script is seen in Ireland. Neither script dominates production in England.

Some well-studied English centres of manuscript production demonstrate that significant scribal resources could be marshalled at major centres throughout the half millennium before the Norman Conquest, that these centres took a variety of institutional forms, and that many housed scribes who practised a high degree of innovation and achieved a high degree of

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92 *Ibid.*; Crick, 'Learning and Training'.

calligraphic attainment. Contact with continental Europe, and with the Brittonic and Gaelic worlds, characterizes these centres; the scribes who copied imported texts purveyed new knowledge but often suppressed or only imperfectly emulated the palaeographical characteristics of the exemplar. The adoption of a new script type did not necessarily follow exposure to a certain set of influences. Indeed, fundamental questions about training and scribal production in late Anglo-Saxon England remain unsolved, to a large extent because the answers are not articulated in texts but lie latent in the strata of manuscript evidence. The commonality of vernacular writing eludes classification in the eleventh century, in particular, but this resistance merits exploration. Here we need to give thought not just to the institutional setting in which a scribe may have worked but to the physical process of learning and writing. Recent studies have suggested that scribes only perform a uniform style in abnormal circumstances: in isolation or subject to ideological commitment. New models are needed which broaden the range of institutional and non-institutional settings and take the writer of English beyond the monastery walls and the cathedral precinct.

Chapter 3

Art and writing: voice, image, object

CATHERINE E. KARKOV

Writing and art were integrated phenomena in Anglo-Saxon England, arguably more so than they were for any other medieval period or culture. The Anglo-Saxons used representation to make manifest both the art of writing and what exactly it meant to write (in Latin, 'scribere'). The Evangelist portraits in the early eighth-century Lindisfarne Gospels (London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero D. iv) are the earliest images of writing Evangelists to survive from northern Europe,[1] and depictions of books, authors, readers and writers of all sorts grew ever more complex as the centuries progressed. In the *c.* 1020 Eadwig (or Hannover) Gospels (Hannover, Kestner Museum, MS WM XXIa 36) the four Evangelists form a sequence that documents the art of writing from picking up the pen, to sharpening the pen, to writing, to displaying the words just written. The images in effect document the production of the book, which seems particularly appropriate as the manuscript was written and probably illustrated by the famous Christ Church Canterbury scribe Eadwig Basan.[2] To a certain extent we have come to expect the interaction of text and image in illuminated manuscripts as both words and images are integral to this type of book, but the Anglo-Saxons extended the relationship between script and image to other types of objects, even architecture. And just as they had used art to interrogate what it meant to write, they used objects and monuments to interrogate what it meant to inscribe, to write into something. Writing visualizes voice, and the Anglo-Saxons used inscription to embed voice into objects. Until quite recently this has been an almost unexplored aspect of Anglo-Saxon art.[3] There have been studies of the language of inscriptions,[4] and numerous studies of individual inscribed

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1 M. Brown, *Lindisfarne Gospels*, p. 349.
2 Karkov, 'Writing and Having Written', and 'Evangelist Portraits'.
3 See Karkov, *Art of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 135–78.
4 Bredehoft, 'First-Person Inscriptions'.

objects,[5] but very few have focused on the intersection of text, object and voice.[6] This chapter will explore three different relationships between writing and art that are absolutely characteristic of Anglo-Saxon culture: the use of script as image; the dialogue between script and image; and the way in which that dialogue changes when the object is made to speak.

Script and image

Placing inscriptions around, within or as a label to images is one of the simplest ways of combining text and image. Sometimes the inscription serves only to identify the image, as do the names and titles of Queen Ælfgyfu and King Cnut on folio 6 of London, British Library, MS Stowe 944, but most inscriptions do much more sophisticated work. One of the earliest, longest and most complex is the inscription that surrounds the Crucifixion on folio 38a^v of the late seventh- or early eighth-century Durham Gospels (Durham, Cathedral Library, MS A.II.17; Figure 3.1). The inscription is broken up in such a way that it reads across the top of the image, then down the right side of the page, then down the left side of the page, and finally across the bottom of the image, an arrangement that forces the viewer to move his or her eyes across and around the image in reading, and this helps to unite the two both visually and in terms of their meaning. But it also presents a puzzle in that, as written, the upper inscription seems incomplete until we realize that it contains two parallel statements: 'Scito quis et qualis est qui talia passus (est) pro nobis propter hoc. [Scito quis et qualis est] cuius titulus (est) cui nulla est inuenta culpa.' Put together the inscription as a whole reads:

Top:	Scito quis et qualis est qui talia cuius titulus cui nulla est inuenta passus p(ro) nobis p(ro)p(ter) hoc culpa.
Right:	Auctorum mortis deicens uitam nostram restituens si tamen conpatiamur.
Left:	Surrexit a mortuis . . . sedet ad dextram d(e)i patris.
Bottom:	Ut nos cum resuscitatos simul et regnare faciat . . .

[Know who and what kind he is who suffered such things for us caused by this [and] whose title is 'in whom no sin was found'. Casting down the author of death renewing our life if we suffer

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5 E.g., Gameson and Gameson, 'Anglo-Saxon Inscription'; Webster, *Franks Casket*.
6 Exceptions are Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*; and Orton *et al.*, *Fragments of History*, pp. 144–69.

3.1 Durham Gospels, Crucifixion (Durham Cathedral Library, MS A.II.17), fol. 38ᵛ.

along with him. He rose from the dead [and] sits at the right hand of God the Father. So that when we have been restored to life he might make us also to reign with him.]⁷

The inscription asks the reader/viewer to meditate both on the image and on its meaning in relation to the text that surrounds it. He or she must puzzle out

7 Transcriptions and translation: O'Reilly, 'Know Who and What He Is'.

and rearrange the inscription at the top of the page, but once divided into two parallel statements it becomes an unambiguous command for meditation on the two natures of Christ.[8] It asks the viewer to identify with and share in the suffering of Christ, but it also focuses attention on his triumph. The miniature makes the same request by showing Christ both dead (the wound in his side was made after his death) and alive, as indicated by his wide staring eyes, which focus attention on his body and its meaning. The combination of suffering and triumph, death and life is picked up in the predominantly yellow and red colour scheme suggestive of gold and blood, the one a sign of eternal life, the other a sign of mortal death, something which puts the page squarely within the tradition of the Ruthwell Cross and the Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood*.

If the Crucifixion page shows us an image surrounded by words, the facing page (fol. 38aʳ) echoes it by presenting us with words that have been shaped into a cross and confined within an interlace frame, like a miniature. The text is Matthew 28:17–20, the end of Matthew's Gospel, and the words provide a verbal parallel to the meaning of the Crucifixion page. They ask us to see and adore Christ (28:17), they request conversion and baptism (28:19), but they also command us 'Behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world' (28:20). 'Behold', 'see' and 'adore' echo across the two pages and underscore the united act of seeing and reading the words and the Word. The text is arranged so that it begins at the level of Christ's head, moves out at the level of his hands and ends at the level of his feet, demonstrating beyond all doubt that the two are meant to be read as one.

A much more personal meditation on Christ is visualized in the tenth-century pictorial frontispiece to St Dunstan's Classbook (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. F.4.32, fol. 1ʳ), which depicts Dunstan as a monk prostrate in humility before a towering figure of Christ. Outline drawing was a major art form in Anglo-Saxon England, and artists like that of this page used it to great effect. The simple addition of a groundline on which Dunstan kneels, and above which Christ rises, captures the sense of a vision in progress. The page contains three inscriptions that are contemporary with and relate to the drawing: the verse distich above the bowed figure of Dunstan; the words inscribed on the book and above the shaft of the rod held by Christ; and a verse distich on the verso of the page. Forensic analysis has revealed the drawing and inscription on the rod and book came first, and that the inscription above Dunstan, the inscription on the verso and some details

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8 See further *ibid.*, pp. 315–16.

of the drawing were added by a second hand.[9] The inscription above the rod is from Psalm 44:7 – '+uirga recta est, uirga regnitiu' [the sceptre of thy kingdom is a sceptre of uprightness] – while the book carries a line from Psalm 33:12: 'uenite filii audite me timorem domini docebo uos' [come, children, hearken to me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord]. Both texts conform to the shape of the objects they accompany, drawing attention to the similarity between object (via the image) and the power of what the object can do (via the words). Both texts are also related to the image of Christ, who literally rises from earth to heaven, affirming that he is both a ruler in heaven and a teacher in this world, again through the unity of Word and word. The phrase from Psalm 44:7 is repeated in the text of the Benedictine Rule, and works to connect the ideals of the two monastic writers and reformers (Benedict and Dunstan) across the centuries through their shared devotion to Christ and the monastic life, as well as to books and learning.

But the two phrases have a much more specific meaning to Dunstan as owner and reader of this book. The classbook is a highly personal reflection of Dunstan's own learning, and Christ alone is Dunstan's Lord and teacher. The three sections that would have been part of the manuscript in Dunstan's day include a diverse set of educational texts in Latin and Greek:

> Section 1 (fols. 1–9), ninth-century Brittany: part of Book 1 of Eutyches' *Ars de verbo* (a Latin grammatical treatise).[10]

> Section 3 (fols. 19–36ᵛ), early ninth-century Wales: *Liber Commonei* (the 'Book of Commoneus', also a sort of commonplace book) comprising computistical, alphabetical, exegetical and liturgical texts in Latin and Greek.

> Section 4 (fols. 37–47), ninth- to tenth-century Wales: Book 1 of Ovid's *Ars amatoria*.

There are also glosses in Welsh and Breton, and a single tenth-century hand believed to be that of Dunstan himself has made additions to each of the three sections.[11] The same hand is responsible for the distichs written above the figure of Dunstan and on the verso of the folio. The former reads:

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9 Budny, 'St Dunstan's Classbook', pp. 129–30.
10 Section 2 (fols. 10–18) is an eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon homily on the finding of the true cross.
11 See Budny, 'St Dunstan's Classbook', pp. 139–40 for the evidence that the hand is that of Dunstan.

Dunstanum memet clemens rogo xpe tuere
Tenarias me non sinas sorbisse procellas.

[I beg you merciful Christ to watch over me, Dunstan,
do not permit the Taenarian storms to overwhelm me]

The two lines have very different sources. The first is based on the words inscribed on Hrabanus Maurus' body in his last Carmen of *De laudibus sanctae crucis*, while the second is from a description of the entrance to the underworld, Taenarum, in Statius' *Thebaid*, II.32–5.[12] They are echoed in spirit in the distich on the verso of the portrait page, two lines from Eugenius of Toledo's epigram *De bono pacis*:

Qui cupis infestum semper vitare chelidrum
Cordis ab affectu pace repelle dolum.

[You who desire always to avoid the hostile fetid serpent,
repel deceit from the disposition of the heart of peace.]

The inscriptions of the frontispiece have a protective function that corresponds to the imagery but, much like the contents of the Classbook, they bring together separate texts that have no obvious direct relationship with each other for the edification of the book's owner. They also function intertextually to make larger thematic and exegetical connections between the texts they quote or make reference to, and to link the authors of those texts – most notably Dunstan, Hrabanus Maurus and Benedict. The depiction of Dunstan prostrate before Christ also serves to associate him with Hrabanus, as the Carmen from which the first line of the distich is taken is embedded in an image of Hrabanus prostrate before the cross. Like Hrabanus, Dunstan is portrayed as a humble servant expressing both his love for and fear of the Lord and his judgement (as the inscription on the book held by Christ instructs him), and Christ turns his head away from Dunstan indicating that his fate remains undecided. But Dunstan's portrait does not have the same sacrificial implications expressed by Hrabanus in his portrait and the acrostic into which it is set.[13] Nor does it show the same inseparability of word and image. Hrabanus' book with its final inscribed portrait is a luxurious tour de force of classical learning, Benedictine ideology, intellectual and theological puzzles and meditations; Dunstan's book with its frontispiece, on the other hand, is a very learned, yet mundane and useable sort of manuscript.

12 Gneuss, 'Dunstan and Hrabanus Maurus'.
13 On Dunstan, his book and his portrait, see Coon, *Dark Age Bodies*, esp. pp. 1–2, 216–46.

The B-text of the *Vita sancti Dunstani* relates that Dunstan diligently cultivated the arts of writing, drawing and painting in his desire for knowledge and in his study of sacred texts, and the drawing can thus be read as a self-portrait.[14] While neither the drawing nor the inscriptions on the book and rod are in Dunstan's own hand, the distich is, and it makes clear that this is how both page and image were to be read. The fact that the image is a drawing helps to further the sense of the unity of the page. Both image and inscriptions are made with the same tools, pen and ink, here executed in the same colours, and are the result of similar gestures made with the hand.

While manuscript inscriptions were designed to be read by individuals or small groups, monumental public inscriptions could address larger audiences, and could convey a unity of word and monument rather than just word and image. At the church of St Mary's, Breamore (Hampshire), built *c.* 970–1020, the arch over the entrance from the nave to the south *porticus* is inscribed with the words 'HER SꝒUTELAÐ SEO GECꝒYDRÆNES ÐE' [Here is made manifest the covenant to you]. The *porticus* may have been used as a chapel or baptistery, and is in a part of the church normally used by the clergy. The words refer to the covenant made with Noah in Genesis 9:8–17. Richard Gameson has taken the fact that it is in the vernacular as a sign of the 'limited Latinity of the parochial clergy',[15] but most surviving 'speaking object' inscriptions of this type are in fact in Old English rather than Latin, regardless of their audience or date.[16] Rather than limited Latinity, it is possible to understand the inscription as relying on a play between languages, script and form, functioning on more than one level. The text is in Old English, but carved in Latin capitals. For those who did not know Latin it was a straightforward biblical reference in their mother tongue; however, for those who knew both Latin and exegesis, the inscription provided something of a riddle. Noah's ark was an Old Testament type of the New Testament Church, and thus the words also referred to the space and architecture of St Mary's itself. Moreover, the Latin word for the rainbow covenant, *arcus*, plays with the form of the actual arch into which the inscription is carved. The fact that the language chosen for the inscription was Old English and not Latin may have had a deeper cultural significance. The story of Noah and the covenant with God lies behind one of the great origin myths of the Anglo-Saxons, their understanding of themselves as a chosen people whose migration mirrored the journey of Noah (as well as

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14 Stubbs (ed.), *Memorials of Saint Dunstan*, pp. 20–1.
15 Gameson and Gameson, 'Anglo-Saxon Inscription', p. 2.
16 Bredehoft, 'First-Person Inscriptions'.

Exodus).[17] Read this way, the seemingly simple inscription becomes a multi-valent text that parallels biblical history with Anglo-Saxon history, the Church with this church, and God's covenant with Noah with a promise held out to the Anglo-Saxons in the here and now of St Mary's.

Script as image

A slightly more visually integrated relationship between script and image is created in those instances where the two become one. The most obvious example of this 'script as image' is the historiated initial, which is by definition a letter containing a narrative scene that relates directly to the text it introduces. It is thus simultaneously script and image, telling one story in two different languages. The Anglo-Saxons invented the historiated initial, and the earliest surviving examples occur in the eighth-century Vespasian Psalter (London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian A. 1, fols. 31ʳ, 53ʳ) and the St Petersburg copy of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* (St Petersburg, National Library, MS Q.v.I.18, fol. 26ᵛ). In the Bede manuscript, thought to be a product of Wearmouth-Jarrow, a portrait of Pope Gregory the Great is contained within the initial *h* that begins the sentence 'His temporibus id est anno dominicae incarnationis DCV beatus papa Gregorius . . . defunctus est' [*HE*, III.2; At around this time in the year of our Lord 605 blessed Pope Gregory . . . died]. The colours used to depict the pope (red, yellow and green) are the same as those used for the geometric background and infilling of the word 'his', ensuring that his figure is visually one with the word. Gregory looks out at the reader and holds a cross in one hand and a book in the other, symbols of his saintliness and wisdom, but also of his evangelizing mission to the English. It is probably the fact that the mission was eventually led by Augustine rather than Gregory that has led to the erroneous inscription 'Augustinus' in his halo.

In the Vespasian Psalter, probably from St Augustine's Canterbury, the relationship between image and letter works rather differently. Colour is used in both of this manuscript's historiated initials to make the image stand out from the text rather than merge with it, and the relationship between what is depicted and the words of the psalms that follow is far more complicated. In the loop of the initial *D* of *Dominus*, the first word of Psalm 26, the psalm of David before he was anointed, David and Jonathan, each holding a spear, clasp hands. The image focuses attention on the friendship and faith of both men in times of adversity, but there are also echoes of the composition in specific
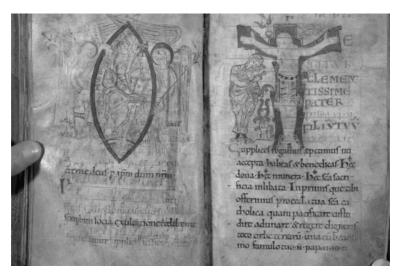
17 Anlezark, *Water and Fire*; N. Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*.

words and verses of the psalm; for example, David can be said to dwell in the letter beginning the name of the Lord just as the psalm says that he dwells in the house of the Lord (26:4). In the *D* for *Dixit* of Psalm 52 David rescues the lamb from the lion, a metaphoric image of the people eaten as bread in verse 5, and God's rescuing of his people in verse 7. Both psalms are important liturgically, so there is a practical reason for inserting images at these points, but in both initials David is placed in a typological relationship with Christ through both letter and image. The names of both David and the Lord begin with the letter *D*, so the letter itself allows for a metonymic association between the two. Like Christ, David also triumphs over evil and rescues the innocent in their time of need. These two images mark the beginning of the English practice of articulating the relationship between David and Christ, the Old Testament and the New Testament, visually as well as textually. Later psalters, such as London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius C.vi, would include full-page narrative scenes from the lives of both David and Christ, while the mid-twelfth-century Eadwine Psalter (a Christ Church Canterbury manuscript) was originally prefaced by a full narrative cycle that told the stories of their lives in entirely pictorial form.

By the end of the Anglo-Saxon period historiated initials had become increasingly complex and sophisticated compositions, and one of the best examples of their development is the double-page opening to the Order of the Mass in the *c.* 1021 Red Book of Darley (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 422, Part II, pp. 52–3), a missal produced at either Sherborne or the New Minster Winchester (Figure 3.2).[18] The historiated initial is the *T* of 'Te igitur', the opening to the Canon of the Mass on page 53, but its composition both complements that of the Christ in Majesty, part of the Preface to the Mass on page 52, and expands on its meaning. The imagery of the two pages is not unusual, but the way in which they represent script as image is. On page 52 the words of the text spread out from within the image, while on page 53 the image becomes the text in more ways than one. The Preface reads:

> Vere dignum et iustum est aequum et salutare nos tibi semper et ubique gratios agere domine sancte pater omnipotens aeterne Deus. Per christum dominum nostrum. Per quem majestatem tuum laudant angeli adorant dominationes tremunt potestates, coeli, coelorumque virtutes, ac beata sera-phim socia exultatione concelebrant. Cum quibus et nostras voces ut admitti jubeas deprecamur supplici confessione dicentes.

18 See further Karkov, 'Text and Image'; and Budny, *Insular, Anglo-Saxon*, pp. 645–50.

3.2 The Red Book of Darley (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 422), Part II, pp. 52–3.

> [It is indeed just and right, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Lord, Holy Father, almighty and eternal. Through Christ our Lord. Through whom the angels praise your majesty, the dominations worship it, the powers stand in awe. The heavens and the heavenly hosts together with the blessed seraphim in triumphant chorus unite to celebrate it. Together with them we entreat you that you may bid our voices also to be admitted, while we say in holy praise . . .]

The page is in fact the inverse of a historiated initial, with the opening words 'vere dignum et iustum est aequum et salutare' enclosed within Christ's mandorla. In the historiated initials discussed above, the image contained in the initial has a direct relationship to the text that follows, but on this page the words contained in the image have a direct relationship to the readers of the book and the function of the text. Writing is a representation of voice. In the prayer the words said by the priest are directed to Christ, and this page shows them received and acknowledged. The green mandorla helps to focus the reader's attention on the body of Christ at the same time that the words are being uttered, while the frontal figure of Christ with his dark staring eyes and hand raised in blessing creates a bond of communication and acknowledgement between image and reader. Beginning with the word 'nos', the words spread out around the lower bodies of the angels until they merge gradually into the regular lines of the text written at the bottom of the page, the alternating colours of the text echoing the red, green and black of the

miniature. Normally the Preface ends with the words of the angels, 'sanctus, sanctus, sanctus', being taken up by the congregation, but the *Sanctus* is not written on either this page or the next, possibly because the combination of image and opening words has already done part of its work by showing 'our' words literally mingled with the flanking figures of the angels, one of whom looks out at us while the other turns his eyes to Christ. The rest of that work is done by the historiated initial on the facing page, which is simultaneously a Crucifixion and an image of the Trinity (with Mary), making visible the Trinitarian focus of the absent *Sanctus*. From left and right the dove of the Holy Spirit and the hand of God appear to flank the crucified but living Son with his wide open eyes ('he who comes in the name of the Lord'). The *T* of the opening words *Te igitur* has been turned into the cross of the Crucifixion, a combination of image and letter that goes back to at least the eighth century,[19] though the earlier versions are hardly this sophisticated. The composition spills out of the initial into the text in a stunning revelation of the Word made manifest in the flesh. Colour is again important with black, red and green used for both image and the opening lines of the prayer. The *Te igitur* is a prayer of intercession, so it is appropriate that the Virgin, the greatest of intercessors on behalf of humanity, is sketched in the same colours as its words. The emphatic diagonal that runs from her hand, to the blood that flows from Christ's side, to the hand of God, is a graphic representation that she has intervened and the prayer has reached heaven. Unusually for late Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion scenes, the Evangelist John is absent, and I have suggested elsewhere that the column of red and green display capitals beneath Christ's left arm might have been understood as substituting for the absent Evangelist, much as text stands in for his figure in the Rupertsberg Codex of Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias* illuminated in the late twelfth century.[20]

The most intriguing part of the initial is the body of Christ, which aside from his loincloth has been only summarily sketched in. The body, the flesh, thus merges with the vellum flesh of the book, a symbol of the Word in the word. Its living and eternal nature is underscored by the green and growing 'tree-of-life-cross', as well as by the streams of blood that flow from the wound in Christ's side towards both Mary and the new shoot that rises up from the ground – both these latter also associated with the birth of Ecclesia (or the Church) – a fitting combination of images with which to begin the Canon of the Mass.

19 See McLachlan, 'Bury Missal'.
20 Karkov, 'Text and Image', p. 145.

Cambridge Corpus Christi College, MS 422, Part I consists of a mid-tenth-century copy of *The Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* in prose and verse (pp. 1–26), which, although not part of the original manuscript, is also concerned with issues of voice and speaking as opposed to reading and the written word.[21] *The Dialogues* visualize voice, but do so through alphabet rather than through any sort of narrative or figural imagery, and they use words to represent, though not in a material way. The copy of the poem *Solomon and Saturn I* (pp. 1–6) is a dialogue between the wise Solomon (the speaker) and his opponent Saturn (the reader) about the nature and power of the Pater Noster. The poem is in Old English, but the Pater Noster prayer, which is neither written nor spoken in full, is represented by a paired series of runic and Roman letters that stand out visually from the English Square minuscule of the rest of the text.[22] The runes are not necessary to the poem in the way that the Latin letters are, as the poem sometimes requires the reader to pronounce the latter, but never the former. The runes do not act 'as signs of words with grammatical, metrical and alliterative significance', or as letters spelling out words, as they do in Cynewulf's runic signatures.[23] The Pater Noster as it is described to Saturn by Solomon is embodied as a victorious warrior, and each of its runic/Roman letters is a weapon in his arsenal against evil in general and Satan in particular. So, for example, ↑. T. 'hine teswað ond hine on ða tungan sticað, wræsteð him ðæt wodder ond him ða wongan brieceð' [injures him and stabs him in the tongue, twists his throat and shatters his jaws].[24] They have been described as 'silent visual additions',[25] but that phrase renders them both passive and mean-ingless, and they are not really either of those things. In the *Dialogues* Saturn is the great reader and historian, a lover of antiquity, especially 'fyrngewritum' [writings of times past].[26] The poem opens with Saturn telling Solomon that he has read the books of all islands, fathomed the science of Libya and Greece and the history of India, but has been unable to find that which he most seeks, the Pater Noster (lines 1–12). The runes are a level of antiquity, however, that he is unable to read. Moreover, Solomon describes the Pater Noster to him in three different systems of signification – or three different systems of representation, depending on how one wants to look at it – all of which are incomplete and none of which Saturn is able to comprehend.

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21 See further O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*; and Anlezark (ed. and trans.), *Dialogues*.
22 The letters *N* and *H* are written only as Roman letters and not in runes.
23 O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*, pp. 58–9.
24 Anlezark (ed. and trans.), *Dialogues*, pp. 68–9, lines 94–5.
25 O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*, p. 58.
26 Anlezark (ed. and trans.), *Dialogues*, p. 31.

The whole point of the Pater Noster in the poem is its power, its ability to protect and do battle for those who believe; but Saturn, as a pagan, cannot be given access to such power. As Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe observes, 'the prayer is spoken (or written) about, but its words are never uttered (or written); its power is described but not called forth. The poem achieves this end by opposing writing with speech. In written silence the prayer is conserved ... for letters, finally, are the signs of words not the words themselves.'[27] Solomon's embodied description of the prayer also provides Saturn with a vision of its power, but not the power itself. Anlezark characterizes the circle by and for which the *Dialogues* must have been written as 'highly literate', 'bookish', 'interested in alternative alphabetic systems' and 'learned in riddling',[28] but it also seems to have been interested specifically in the gaps between signification and representation and that which is signified or represented. Solomon uses letters to represent something that remains unwritten, sounds to represent something that remains unspoken, and describes a warrior who remains unseen except as a vision in the mind of Saturn and the reader.

Script, image, object, voice

The most intriguing examples of the art of writing are those objects or images that involve voice, either by speaking in the first person or by speaking their own stories. These sorts of combinations of text and image literally give voice to their own materiality and project a sense of self into that which is doing the speaking. Without doubt the most famous example of this type of object is the eighth-century Ruthwell Cross (Figure 3.3). Like the Breamore arch, it is an inscribed stone monument, but one that combines inscriptions and images in multiple ways. Like *Solomon and Saturn I*, it uses words to conjure a vision that remains unrepresented, and like that poem it uses runes, but this time they are used to write out an entire poem, and are meant to blend harmoniously with the images they surround rather than stand out as something different.

Ruthwell is a multilingual monument. It communicates in two different languages, two different alphabets, two different voices and two different types of text and imagery. The two broad faces of the cross are carved with figural scenes confined within rectangular panels, and I have argued elsewhere

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27 O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*, p. 59; Isidore, *Etymologiae*, I.iii, I: 'Litterae ... signa uerborum.'
28 Anlezark (ed. and trans.), *Dialogues*, pp. 14, 29.

3.3 The Ruthwell Cross, original south side.

that together they are intended to represent a community in and through the body of Christ.[29] Each panel on the two broad faces is surrounded by a Latin inscription carved in Roman display capitals. On the original west face of the shaft each panel has a eucharistic significance, and depicts a figure or pair of figures displaying the body of Christ in alternately literal and symbolic form: Mary holds the infant Christ in the flight into or out of Egypt; Paul and Anthony break bread, in the desert; the beasts in the desert cross their paws to support the adult Christ; John the Baptist holds the agnus dei. The inscriptions that surround these panels are written in third-person Latin prose and, with the exception of the inscription accompanying John the Baptist, identify the figures and actions

29 Karkov, 'Naming and Renaming'.

represented. For example, 'Sanctus Paulus et Antonius duo eremitae fregerunt panem in deserto' [Saints Paul and Anthony, two hermits, broke bread in the desert]. On the original east face of the shaft the figures, along with their accompanying inscriptions, are more active in comparison to the frontal motionless figures on the west face, and the symbolism is baptismal rather than eucharistic. The Crucifixion carved on the base beneath the Annunciation is a ninth-century addition. It is a clumsy representation of the event that the cross as a whole asks the viewer to envisage within her/his own mind. At the base of the shaft is the Annunciation, with Gabriel shown entering the space of the panel and Mary shrinking back; in the healing of the man born blind, Christ reaches out towards the eyes of the blind man; Mary Magdalene washes Christ's feet with her tears and dries them with the hair of her head; Elizabeth reaches out to touch Mary's belly. In this top panel the viewer must imagine what cannot be seen, the unborn John the Baptist leaping in his mother's womb as he recognizes the divinity of the unborn Christ. But the visitation panel has also been turned into a depiction of the sisters Martha and Mary through the addition of the inscription, which reads '[-] marþ[a] mar[ia] m . . . r dominnae c[-]' [Martha and Mary . . . [something]], possibly 'Martha and Mary *merentes dominae*', and has been reconstructed alternatively (and problematically) as 'Martha and Mary worthy women' or 'Martha and Mary mother of the Lord'. The inscriptions on this side of the cross are also in third-person Latin prose but, again with the exception of the uppermost panel, they describe the action represented rather than naming the figures depicted. For example, 'Attulit alabastrum unguenti et stans retro secus pedes eius lacrimis coepit rigare pedes eius et capillis capitis sui tergebat' [She brought an alabaster box of ointment and standing behind beside his feet she began to wash his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head].

The narrow sides are each carved with a continuous inhabited vine-scroll that rises the entire length of the shaft, and are inscribed with an Old English poem written in runes that runs (basically) down the length of the shaft balancing the upward movement of the vine-scroll. The poem is written in the first-person voice of the cross. On the original north side of the shaft the cross speaks as the gallows (*galgu*):

> [+ond]geredæ hinæ god almeittig·
> þa he walde on galgu gistiga
> modig f[ore] [allæ] men
> [b]ug . . .
> [ahof] ic riicnæ kyniŋc·
> heafunæs hlafard

> hælda ic ni dorstæ
> [b]ismærædu uŋket men ba æt[g]ad[re
> i]c [wæs] miþ blodi bist[e]mi[d]
>   bi[got][en of] . . .³⁰

Reconstructed, the verses translate as follows:

> Almighty God stripped himself
> when he wished to mount the gallows,
> brave in the sight of all men.
> I dared not bow.
> I [raised aloft] a powerful king.
> The Lord of heaven
> I dared not tilt.
> Men insulted the pair of us together.
> I was drenched with blood
> [begotten from that man's side].

The emphasis in these verses is on the revelation and display of both Christ and the cross, and they therefore offer a verbal parallel to the imagery of the west face.

On the south side of the shaft the cross identifies itself as the *rod*:

> [+k]ris[t] wæs on rodi·
> hweþræ þer fusæ fearran kwomu
> æþþilæ til anum ic þæt al bi[h][eald]
> s[aræ] ic w[æ]s· mi[þ] so[r]gu[m] gi[d]rœ[fi]d
> h[n]a[g] . . .
> miþ s[t]re[l]um giwundad
> alegdun hiæ [h]inæ limwœrignæ· gistoddu[n
> h]im [æt] [his] [li][c]æs [hea]f[du]m
> [bih]ea[ld]u[n h]i[æ þ]e[r] . . .

The reconstructed translation would be:

> Christ was on the cross.
> But eager ones came hither from afar.
> Noble ones came to him in his solitude. I beheld all that.
> I was terribly afflicted with sorrows.
> I bowed [to the hands of men],
> wounded with arrows.
> They laid him down, limb-weary;
> they stood at the shoulders of the corpse.
> They looked upon the Lord [of heaven].

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30 Square brackets indicate letters that have been supplied or restored based on the text of the Vercelli Book version of *The Dream of the Rood*.

This time the coming together of figures, including figures from afar, and the bowing of the cross provide verbal parallels to both the voice of the inscriptions and the actions of the figures on the east face.

The arrangement of both runic inscriptions is identical, running first across the top border, then in horizontal rows first down the right side and then the left side. As with the inscription that surrounds the Durham Gospels Crucifixion, the arrangement helps to unite the inscriptions with the vine-scrolls at the centre of the panels as the eye moves from one to the other. On Ruthwell, however, the twig-like nature of the runes adds to the visual harmony. The first-person voice of the poem and the inhabited vine-scroll (Christ the true vine feeding the faithful) work to make the viewer feel one with the animals nibbling at the bunches of grapes, and one with the cross raising aloft Christ's bleeding body and then lowering it to the hands of men. The cross invites all to participate in its narratives (even as it excludes the non-Christian, the illiterate and those literate only in other languages).

The runic poem has a first and a second half, a beginning and an end, so for those who could read it or knew it by heart, the two halves helped to direct movement around the monument, but they also helped to make symbolic transitions between the two broad sides. The scenes on the west face of the cross have a eucharistic symbolism and they can thus be related to the first section of the poem on the monument's north side in which the cross, like the figures on the west face, raises Christ aloft. But the blood that flows from Christ's side at the end of this half of the poem is symbolic of baptism, and thus it can also be related to the imagery of the east face of the cross. That imagery also asks us not only to touch or hold, but to internalize the body of Christ in order to be brought to light like the blind man, or overcome sin like the Magdalene. The panels on the east face of the cross in turn look forward to the end of the poem on the south side of the shaft in which, having raised aloft the body of Christ, the *rod* bows down afflicted with sorrows. Here, after the triumphant statement 'krist wæs on rodi', the central verses turn to the private internal struggle of the cross.

One of the primary functions of the cross was to invoke a metonymic vision of the Crucifixion arrived at through an understanding of its texts and its images of figures and animals who touch, hold or consume the body of Christ in its multiple forms. One of the most important aspects of the poem is the way in which it engages the body and soul of the reader/viewer, making her or him (there are just as many women on this cross as there are men) a part of the Crucifixion. Standing on the north side, the reader is placed to Christ's

right as the iconographic conventions of medieval art tell us that the wound in Christ's side was in his right side. This is the position usually reserved for Mary in Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion scenes (see Figure 3.2 above). On the south side of the cross the poem includes the line 'ic þæt al biheald'. The cross witnesses and records and invites us to do so along with it. It places us in the position of John the Evangelist whose role as witness would become so prominent a feature of late Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion scenes.[31]

As long as one is able to decipher and read the inscriptions, the meaning of the words is clear, but the cross speaks in multiple voices and different languages, and records its words in different scripts, and it remains questionable whether all of these would have been equally clear even to a literate and learned Anglo-Saxon audience. There is also a tension created between languages. The Latin inscriptions written in a third-person impersonal voice identify the scenes and/or name the figures depicted. They are laid out in a relatively straightforward manner and certainly any literate religious man or woman would have had little trouble either reading them or understanding their meaning. The runic poem is much more difficult and complex. Its layout is not straightforward, and the characters themselves are smaller and less easy to decipher. Even if we grant that a learned Anglo-Saxon reader would have been able to make out the individual words and verses,[32] it would not have been an easy task, and it certainly would not have been possible for the *average* literate person. The poem is in the Old English language, the familiar spoken language of the Anglo-Saxons, but it is written in runes, an alphabet less familiar. The poetic voice of the cross thus unites it with its audience at the same time that it declares its difference from it. Runes were considered an archaic script, and the use of runes for Ruthwell's vernacular poem lends the words of the cross both a sense of age or antiquity and a sense of mystery – as if they were an old story recounted by a wise and aged man or woman. The story they tell *is* an old one, one of the earliest foundation stories of the Christian religion and Christian Church, and the cross that speaks the story is equally old and most certainly wise. The inscription may also be understood as paralleling the content of the poem in that it presents a riddle that the reader must struggle to unlock, as content and meaning are accessible only after script, word order and language have all been deciphered. Finally, the voice of the inscriptions sets Old English in a different relationship to the monument from that of Latin. The monument, in effect, Englishes both the biblical event and the cross by presenting the poem as an oral performance spoken in the

31 O'Reilly, 'St John'.
32 See Ó Carragáin, 'Who Then Read the Ruthwell Poem'.

voice of the cross. It gives the stone an internal voice with which it speaks its history, turning it into a living being. Spoken words always suggest the presence of a self, even if the written text, especially a text written in the archaic script of the Ruthwell poem, signifies absence and the past.

A similar sense of an enigmatic voice and text from the past, combination of visual and verbal reading, something revealed and yet concealed, something that hovers between inanimate object and living being, characterizes the Franks Casket (Figure 3.4, a and b), although on the casket all these things are manifested or embedded differently. The Franks Casket is a small

3.4, a and b The Franks Casket, front and back panels.

(*c.* 23 × 19 × 13 cm) whalebone ivory box made in Northumbria, or at least by a Northumbrian craftsperson, in the first half of the eighth century.[33] Gaby Waxenberger has recently provided linguistic evidence for the carver (or person who composed the inscription) coming from the area around Whitby or Jarrow.[34] Its original patron/owner and function are uncertain. Because many of its scenes are secular it is often assumed that it was made for a secular aristocrat, and because it is so highly literate it is assumed that it must have been made in a monastic setting. It could have been made to hold treasure, a book, a relic or relics. Its form and design, though not its imagery, are similar to surviving early Christian reliquaries.[35]

On each of the four sides of the casket a narrative scene or scenes is surrounded by a lengthy inscription, with additional labels sometimes provided for individual events or figures. The front is carved with a scene from the story of Weland the smith and the adoration of the magi, on the back is Titus' sack of the Temple in Jerusalem, on one side Romulus and Remus are suckled by the she-wolf, and on the other is an enigmatic scene involving a muzzled creature sitting on a mound, a horse, a body within a burial mound and three cloaked and hooded figures. The lid has been damaged so that only one panel depicting a battle involving 'Ægili' (the Germanic hero Egil) survives, but a lengthy inscription may once have been carved on its missing portions. The inscriptions are in a mixture of Old English and Latin, Insular and runic (conventional and encoded) scripts, and are arranged in a variety of orientations. Like the Ruthwell Cross, the casket presents the reader with a series of visual and verbal stories and puzzles to be deciphered. The arrangement of the inscribed passages highlights both the connections between panels and their difficult and puzzling nature. There is not space here to discuss the whole of the casket, so I will focus only on the front and back panels.[36]

The front of the casket originally carried the lock and would thus have been the focus of attention for anyone locking or unlocking it to reveal or conceal its contents. It juxtaposes a scene from Germanic legend with one from biblical history. On the left, the hamstrung Weland is in the process of making a cup

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33 See further Webster, *Franks Casket*, and bibliography therein.
34 Unpublished paper delivered at the 13th conference of the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists, St John's, Newfoundland, July 2009.
35 On the similarities between the Franks Casket and early Christian reliquaries, see Webster, *Franks Casket*, pp. 31–41.
36 For a full discussion of the casket, see Karkov, *Art of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 146–53.

from the skull of King Nithhad's son before raping his daughter Beaduhild (who subsequently gives birth to the hero Widia) and flying away. On the right the three magi (labelled 'mægi') present their gifts to the enthroned Virgin and Child. The Old English poetic inscription is arranged so that it surrounds and unites both scenes, indicating that they are to be read together. The inscription is prosopopoeic and borrows from the convention of textual riddles, but its play with materiality sets it apart from the textual tradition. Assuming that we begin reading at upper left, the inscription states:

fisc flodu ahof on fergenberig
warþ gasric grorn þær he on greut giswom
Hronæs ban

[The fish beat up the seas [or rose by means of the sea] onto the mountainous cliff; gasric became sad when he swam aground onto the shingle. Whale's bone.][37]

'Gasric' is usually translated as 'the king of terror', but Waxenberger has recently suggested that it could be the name of the whale and mean something like 'the one strong in life or power';[38] however, even if read as an epithet rather than a personal name, the word still serves to identify or name the whale. The section of the verse referring to Gasric is carved retrograde along the bottom of the panel, drawing attention to the reversal of the whale's fortune. The words 'Whale's bone' are not part of the verse inscription, and are carved along the left edge of the panel next to the scene of Weland the smith. If 'gasric' is understood as a 'name' for the whale, the casket, like so many of the figures depicted on it, takes on a named identity underscoring the fact that it was once a living creature. In any case, the identification of the living material from which the casket is made, placed alongside the panel depicting the manufacture of a different type of container from the bone of another living being, makes the same point. The runes chosen for alliteration in this verse, *f* in the first line and *g* in the second, may be significant as the name of the *f* rune is *feoh* [treasure] and that for the *g* is *giefa* [gift],[39] and they could be a literate play on the casket's material and function, as whalebone is both treasure and a gift from the sea.

The back panel depicts the fall of Jerusalem to the Emperor Titus in AD 70, with the temple at the centre of the panel and a group of hostages being led away at right. At lower left the word *dom* [judgement] is carved next to a scene

37 All translations are based on Page, *Introduction to English Runes*.
38 Unpublished paper.
39 See, e.g., Krause and Jankuhn, *Runeninschriften*, pp. 205–6; and Becker, *Franks Casket*, pp. 98–100.

of judgement, and at lower right the word *gisl* [hostage] next to a scene of a figure or figures being led away. A figure seated beneath the throne at left holds out a cup in a gesture reminiscent of that of Weland on the front of the casket. The inscription is in a mixture of runic and Roman letters and reads 'her fegtaþ titus end giuþeasu. Hic fugiant Hierusalim afitatores' [Here Titus and a Jew [or Jews] fight. Here the inhabitants flee Jerusalem]. The inscription begins in runic letters and Old English, changes into Latin and the Roman alphabet for the beginning of the flight of the Jews, and then remains in Latin but switches back into runes for the final word 'afitatores'. The change may be meant to draw attention to the mention of the Holy City,[40] and/or the start of the new order that began with its destruction by Rome;[41] however, the move from Old English to Latin and back again also serves to embed the Latin within the Old English and the Roman within the runic. As was the case with Ruthwell, the multiple languages and alphabets create a layering of time, voice, geographies and peoples. A key episode in Rome's history is told in Old English, the Jewish city of Jerusalem is named in Latin (a verbal parallel to Titus' claiming the city for Rome), but its inhabitants are named in Old English. The word used for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, 'afitatores', is a corrupt form of the Latin 'habitatores', which is further transformed by being carved in runes. The result is that the inhabitants of Jerusalem are transformed into a people at once Roman (language) and 'Anglo-Saxon' or 'Germanic' (alphabet), yet not quite either. The inscription effects transformation or metamorphosis, as did the Gasric inscription, and encapsulates the Anglo-Saxons' historical self-identification with both the Israelites and the Romans.

There are many ways in which the visual narratives of the Franks Casket might be read. They tell stories of life and death, danger and redemption, defence and victory, exile and return, civilization and wilderness, treasure and its loss, and evil and heroism, but they also provide a metonymic play on containers and containment, on what the casket is and does. Architecture encloses bodies, cups appear in three of the five panels, the wolf's body is a container dispensing nourishment. The inscription on the front of the casket tells us that it was once a living creature, it is made from living bone, and as such it hovers in the space between the living and the dead. It would be particularly appropriate if it once contained a relic or a Gospel book, as relics

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40 Hinton, *Gold & Gilt*, p. 100.
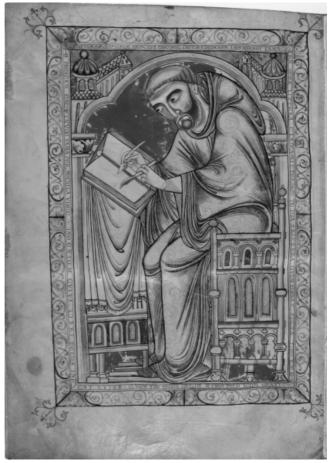41 Webster, *Franks Casket*, p. 38.

were both the living saints and inanimate objects, while sacred books were also made from living things (and contained the living word). The real riddle, then, is not in the inscriptions but in the materiality of the casket and its transformation from one type of living creature to another. It was once a whale, and even as a box it still is.

The Eadwine Psalter (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.17.1) was produced at Christ Church Canterbury in the middle of the twelfth century (*c.* 1155–60). It is an Anglo-Norman rather than an Anglo-Saxon manuscript, but its heteroglossia, its use of Old English and the Anglo-Saxon past, and its speaking portrait of the scribe Eadwine make it a fitting work with which to conclude this chapter. Six artists and ten scribes worked on the manuscript, though there is one main artist and one main scribe, and Eadwine is believed to have been the main scribe – alternatively he could have been the manuscript's designer or patron.[42] The linguistic and textual complexity of the psalter is impressive. It is a *psalterium triplex*, combining the three translations of the text attributed to Jerome – the Gallicanum (the main text), the Romanum and the Hebraicum (both written in smaller script and narrower columns which run parallel down the sides of the page) – as well as interlinear translations into Old English (accompanying the Romanum) and Anglo-Norman French (translating the Hebraicum), the *parva glosatura* or *glossa ordinaria* (a standard gloss or commentary on Psalms 1–150), a series of exegetical prologues, tituli and collects, and a cycle of illuminations that is both a visual narrative and a gloss on the written text. It is a 'literal psalter', in which each psalm is prefaced by a miniature that provides a literal translation of its words into imagery. In Eadwine the arrangement of the miniatures, running across the whole of the page after the prologue but before the psalm proper, allows them to serve as a point of union for the multiple textual translations that follow, the single miniature being equally applicable to each translation. The manuscript originally opened with a series of at least four leaves of painted narrative scenes of Old and New Testament subjects from Exodus to the Acts of the Apostles (now divided between London and New York).[43] Textually and linguistically this psalter maps its own history from Jerome, to the Anglo-Saxons, to the Anglo-Normans, and pictorially it develops the typological cycle of Old and New Testament imagery that the Anglo-Saxons introduced into their illuminated psalters.

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42 See Gibson *et al.* (eds.), *Eadwine Psalter*.
43 London, British Library, MS Add. 37472(1); London, Victoria and Albert Museum, MS 661; New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M 521 and 724.

3.5 Portrait of the scribe Eadwine, from the Eadwine Psalter (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.17.1), fol. 283^{v}.

The portrait of Eadwine on folio 283^{v} (Figure 3.5) provides a fitting point of closure to the manuscript's combined textual and pictorial programme. Having read through the book, the reader arrives finally at the portrait of Eadwine, from whose pen the majority of the text flowed (whether literally or metaphorically), and whose image serves as the ultimate sign of the inseparability of word and image in this manuscript. Eadwine, for his part, gazes back towards the book he has written, for and by which he will be praised, his pose echoing that of the blessed man of Psalm 1 with whose image and textual description the psalter proper began.

The portrait is surrounded by and in dialogue with an inscription in which the scribe demands the animation of his written words and they respond:

Scriptor: s[c]riptorum princeps ego. Nec obitura deinceps laus mea nec fama. Quis sim mea littera clama. Littera: Te tua s[c]riptura quem signat picta figura. Predicat Eadwinum fama per secula vivum. Ingenium cuius libri decus indicat huius. Quem tibi seque datum munus dues accipe gratum.

[Scribe: I am the chief of scribes, and neither my praise nor fame shall die; shout out, oh my letter, who I may be. Letter: By its fame your script proclaims you, Eadwine, whom the painted figure represents, alive through the ages, whose genius the beauty of this book demonstrates. Receive, O God, the book and its donor as an acceptable gift.] [44]

As was the case with the Durham Gospels Crucifixion page, the inscription is arranged so that the eye must criss-cross the image of Eadwine. It begins at the upper left, and runs across the top and then down the right-hand border, then goes back up to the top of the left-hand border, and runs down, and then across beneath Eadwine's feet. The last words written at the bottom of the right-hand border are 'picta figura' [painted figure], and we then look across the painted figure itself in order to read the remainder of the inscription. Colour has been used to indicate that Eadwine is the ultimate source of the words, green having been chosen both as the dominant colour of the portrait and for the words identifying the speakers, 'Scriptor' and 'Littera', the latter word placed level with the book in which Eadwine writes. Eadwine sits copying the psalms (songs of praise), while the letter affirms the praise he will receive for his actions.

The psalms were meant to be sung, and both references to and images of voice and singing occur throughout the manuscript. Eadwine's name and voice appear a second time in the book inscribed in a prayer that follows the collect for Psalm 150 on folio 262[r].

Omnipotens et misericors deus, clementiam tuam suppliciter deprecor, ut me famulum tuam Eadwinum tibi fideliter servire concedas, et perseverentiam bonam et felicem consummationem michi largiri digneris, et hoc psalterium quia in conspectus tuo cantavi ad salutem et ad remedium animae meae perficiat sempiternum. Amen.

[Almighty and merciful God I humbly beseech your clemency that you allow me, your servant Eadwine, to serve you faithfully, and will deign to confer on me good perseverance and a happy end. And may this Psalter that I have sung

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44 Gibson *et al.* (eds.), *Eadwine Psalter*, p. 180 (Heslop's translation).

in your sight be perfected for the health and eternal salvation of my soul. Amen.][45]

Here voice and writing come together: Eadwine is a singer as well as a scribe. But seeing is also crucial to their transmission: Eadwine sings in the sight of God the very songs (letters) that speak in his own sight in the portrait.

The Eadwine Psalter is a monument to the inherited textual and pictorial traditions of the Anglo-Saxons in general, and of Christ Church, the home of the scribe Eadwig Basan, in particular. It is based visually on the type of writing Evangelist depicted in the Lindisfarne Gospels, but it is also a new type of author portrait, which gives unusual prominence to the work and status of a contemporary named scribe. It expands on the multilingualism of Ruthwell, or St Dunstan's Classbook, and materializes the dialogue between image and text that was inherent in both earlier works. The Eadwine Psalter in effect doubles the past in the sense that it is simultaneously a memorializing of the past and its traditions and a statement for a new post-Anglo-Saxon future.

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45 *Ibid*., p. 180, note 10 (Heslop's translation).

Chapter 4

Of Bede's 'five languages and four nations': the earliest writing from Ireland, Scotland and Wales

MÁIRE NÍ MHAONAIGH

As is clear from his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* [*An Ecclesiastical History of the English People*], which he completed in 731, Bede considered the activities of neighbouring peoples to have been an important part of the particular version of English history he wished to relate. Contact between them must have been continuous, and constant interaction occasioned much opportunity for mutual influence and exchange of ideas across a wide area.[1] Notwithstanding this, the written traditions of the British, Irish and Picts – the three groups which alongside the English constituted for Bede his 'four nations' (*HE*, I.1) – are varied in both the extent and nature of the material that has survived. The cultures shared common concerns yet were moulded by local developments. Overlapping strands in their narratives, however important, form but a part of individual literary histories, each located in a particular time and place.

For Bede their Christian strand was most significant and in this regard the Irish in particular are praised. He applauded their conversion tactics, specifically the mission of Aidan, later bishop of Lindisfarne, and Columba, founder and first abbot of Iona, to the Picts and to his own territory of Northumbria. The Irish succeeded admirably where native Britons had failed. Newly converted Anglo-Saxons travelled in large numbers to Irish monasteries to avail themselves of scholarship presumably lacking at home (*HE*, III.7, 25, 27). Among them was Aldfrith, king of Northumbria (d. 704), whose sojourn among the Irish before he succeeded to the kingship had ensured that he became *in scripturis doctissimus* [*HE*, IV.26; most learned in the Scriptures] and during which he may even have acquired an Irish name (Flann Fína).[2]

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1 See Ní Mhaonaigh, *'Légend hÉrenn'*.
2 Ireland (ed. and trans.), *Old Irish Wisdom Texts*.

Dealings with Irish leaders may also date from this period and it was on political business that Aldfrith was first visited by Adomnán, abbot of Iona, who sought out the Northumbrian king to plead for the release of Irish hostages who had been captured in a Saxon raid on Brega in the Irish midlands in 685.[3] Writing half a century or so later, Bede deemed these Irish contacts to have been of key importance; Irish influence in English ecclesiastical history is for him a major theme.[4]

Bede considers the English and the Irish alongside the other island peoples, the Britons and the Picts. Turned back from Ireland's shore by the Scoti (Irish), the Picts were advised by them to settle in the northern parts of Britain, since the native inhabitants occupied the southern parts. In time they were joined by migrating Irish who occupied Pictish territory. Bede is familiar with the term Dál Riata and rightly comments: 'nam lingua eorum daal partem significat' [HE, I.I; for in their language Dál signifies a part]. Moreover, he notes the linguistic distinctiveness of Britons and Picts, noting also, however, that the latter were united with their English, British and Irish counterparts in their study of God's truth and that a fifth language, Latin, 'quae meditatione scripturarum ceteris omnibus est facta communis' [though the contemplation of the Scriptures is in general use among them all].[5] In Bede's world, therefore, such disparate peoples were brought together by their common Christianity, and his concern with neighbouring regions is an important part of the account of the growth of the English Church he is seeking to impart.

As Bede's tantalizing glimpses of these peoples reveal, their influence on the English could be enduring and profound; they in turn were affected by the English in continuing, various ways. That evidence for such mutual interaction should be attested in the intellectual sphere which was controlled and directed by their common denominator, the Church, is only to be expected. Having the benefit of a mutually comprehensible learned language in Latin, scholars moved between ecclesiastical establishments, bringing with them books. That they exchanged ideas, as well as artistic and scribal techniques, both formally and informally, is evident. Indeed, such is the degree of

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3 Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds. and trans.), *Annals of Ulster*, pp. 148–51 (685.2 and 687.5). On Adomnán's visit, see *HE*, III.26 and Adomnán, *Life of Columba*, ed. Anderson and Anderson, II.46. Moisl has interpreted the visit as one episode in a long, complex relationship between Bernician royalty and the northern Irish dynasty Uí Néill ('Bernician Royal Dynasty', pp. 120–4). See also T. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 429–38.

4 For an overview of ecclesiastical contacts between Ireland and England in the seventh and eighth centuries, see K. Hughes, 'Evidence for Contacts'.

5 *HE*, I.I; see also Forsyth, 'Literacy in Pictland', pp. 41–2.

homogeneity assumed between certain centres of production that debate now rages as to the precise place of origin of such illuminated Latin Gospel books as the late seventh-century Book of Durrow, the Lindisfarne Gospels of about 700, and the eighth-century masterpiece the Book of Kells.[6] Particular cultural features may well be apparent in some scriptoria stretching from parts of Ireland to Iona and further southwards to Northumbria; then as now, literary fashion may have ensured that certain traits became relatively widespread at a given time. Nonetheless, neither a shared academic endeavour nor regular contact could eliminate difference, even if to do so was considered desirable, an approach for which no evidence survives. Varying resources, as well as varied needs and interests, ensured that learned establishments placed their emphases in different spheres. Notwithstanding the overarching arm of a common Christian Church, in the world of literature and learning variety prevailed.

Comparison between different cultural regions, however, is often difficult to make, since survival of sources varies considerably from place to place. In terms of both range of date and sheer breadth of material, Anglo-Saxon England and Ireland are most closely comparable. By contrast, Scotland, in the sense of the territory now so defined, is relatively barren, despite the fact that the territory closest to Ireland, identified correctly by Bede as Dál Riata, formed a cultural continuum with its nearest neighbour, its people sharing a common language and heritage with the Irish.[7] Straddling both Irish and Scottish Dál Riata is the figure of one of Bede's heroes, St Columba, whose heartland was the island of Iona where he went on his departure from Ireland in 563.[8] The ties of the important monastery he founded there remained for some time with his homeland, and Colum Cille, as he is known in the vernacular, symbolizes the close cultural connections across the Northern Sea. His obscure elegy, *Amrae Coluim Chille* [*Columba's Eulogy*], attributed to Dallán Forgaill, was long considered to be the earliest datable poem in Irish to have survived.[9] While the core of the text may be from the late sixth or early seventh century, Jacopo Bisagni has shown that it was revised and enlarged in the ninth century.[10] Whatever its date, however, it is

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6 For a brief summary, see O'Sullivan, 'Manuscripts'.
7 The argument that the close links reflected Irish migration to Dál Riata has been challenged by Ewan Campbell, who views the inhabitants of the latter territory as people who had always lived in what later became Scotland, sharing a language with their Irish neighbours (*Saints and Sea-Kings*, and 'Were the Scots Irish?').
8 Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), *Annals of Inisfallen*, pp. 74–5.
9 Stokes (ed. and trans.), 'Bodleian Amra Choluimb Chille'.
10 Bisagni, 'Language and Date'.

specific about Columba's qualities as a scholar, noting his familiarity with patristic authors such as John Cassian, as well as his knowledge of legal, scriptural and astrological matters.[11] His 'serc léigind' [love of learning] is also deemed paramount in a pair of poems in praise of him ascribed to a later kinsman, Bécán mac Luigdech, which are likely to be seventh century in date.[12] On account of this learned zeal, 'léciss coicthiu, léciss caithri' [he abandoned battles, he abandoned fortresses].[13] His late seventh-century biographer, Adomnán, similarly alluded to his scholarly prowess[14] and he has been cited as the author of the polished abecedarian seventh-century hymn on Creation, *Altus Prosator* [*The High Creator*].[15] The attribution became established and forms part of the vernacular prefaces to the poem in the two copies preserved in the eleventh-century manuscript Liber Hymnorum.[16] That the poem is highly unlikely to have been composed by Columba, as Jane Stevenson has shown,[17] does not negate the fact that he had acquired a considerable scholarly reputation already in the century or so after his death. As the founder of a key centre of learning, Iona, it is not surprising that his name should be associated with some of the monastery's significant literary products even after his death.

A near contemporary copy of Columba's *Vita* by Admonán has survived in the hand of the early eighth-century scribe and abbot of Iona, Dorbéne.[18] It owes its survival, like many other (mainly Irish) manuscripts, to the fact that it was brought to the continent in the medieval period; it was in Reichenau in the thirteenth century and at an unknown period came to

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11 'By his wisdom he made glosses clear. He fixed the Psalms, he made the books of Law known, those books Cassian loved. He won battles with gluttony. The books of Solomon, he followed them. Seasons and calculations he set in motion. He separated the elements according to figures among the books of the Law. He read mysteries and distributed the Scriptures among the schools, and he put together the harmony concerning the course of the moon, the course which it ran with the rayed sun, and the course of the sea' (T. O. Clancy (ed.), *Triumph Tree*, p. 104). See also Stokes (ed. and trans.), 'Bodleian Amra Choluimb Chille', pp. 253–9.

12 F. Kelly (ed. and trans.), 'Poem in Praise of Columb Cille' (the attribution to Bécán occurs in glosses to the text; in the title it is said to be the work of the better-known Dallán Forgaill: p. 2), and 'Tiughraind Bhécáin'. The reference to 'serc léigind' is in the latter poem, §18, p. 84.

13 F. Kelly (ed. and trans.), 'Tiughraind Bhécáin', §17, p. 84; earlier the poet claims that 'to-gó dánu' [he chose learning], §16, p. 84.

14 Adomnán, *Life of Columba*, ed. Anderson and Anderson, II.8, 9, 44.

15 *Ibid*., p. xxxvi.

16 Bernard and Atkinson (eds. and trans.), *Liber Hymnorum*, vol. I, pp. 68–83.

17 J. Stevenson, 'Altus Prosator'.

18 On the evidence concerning Dorbéne's abbacy, see Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, p. 58. Dorbéne died in 713, five months after obtaining the abbacy, according to Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds. and trans.), *Annals of Ulster*, pp. 168–9 (713.5).

Schaffhausen where it is still housed.[19] More remarkable still is the preservation of a Latin Gospel book, the Book of Deer, produced further east in Old Deer, Aberdeenshire, probably in the tenth century.[20] Best known for its twelfth-century additions in Latin and the vernacular,[21] the latter, concerned directly with the monastery of Deer, were written in a number of different hands and constitute the earliest direct evidence for Gaelic in Scotland.[22] The lack of companion codices led Kathleen Hughes to ask 'Where are the writings of early Scotland?' and in response to her own question she suggested that in this case absence of evidence really does imply evidence of absence and that little was written down.[23] This view has rightly been challenged, Patrick Sims-Williams noting that Scottish manuscripts were more likely to have been brought to Ireland where they could easily have perished, rather than to the continent. In addition, he adduces evidence suggesting that in the Anglo-Norman environment of the twelfth-century Scottish Church, 'Scottish writings may simply have ceased to be copied' and hence did not survive.[24] Bede, as we have seen, perceived no difference between the Picts, on the one hand, and the English, British and Irish on the other, in their study of Christian writings.[25] We may assume, therefore, that they too must have had books. The same author referred to King Nechtan 'admonitus ecclesiasticarum frequenti meditatione scripturarum' [having been convinced by his assiduous contemplation of ecclesiastical writings], as Katherine Forsyth has noted.[26] The texts that this eighth-century Pictish ruler examined in detail, in their Scottish guise at least, must since have been lost.

Other traces of the writing produced by the inhabitants of the territories of what were once Dál Riata and Pictland are in fact extant. Annalistic texts, predominantly in Latin, the production of which was a preoccupation of the monastery of Iona from at least the middle of the seventh century, owe their survival to the fact that an 'Iona Chronicle' was brought to Ireland in the 740s and incorporated into the 'Chronicle of Ireland' from which many of the

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19 Adomnán, *Life of Columba*, ed. Anderson and Anderson, p. liv.
20 Cambridge, University Library, MS Ii.6.32; on various aspects of the manuscript, see the articles in Forsyth (ed.), *Studies on the Book of Deer*.
21 Jackson, *Gaelic Notes*; Ó Maolalaigh, 'Scotticisation of Gaelic'.
22 Both 'Irish' and 'Gaelic' are terms used to describe the common literary language of early medieval Ireland and Scotland, with the former often used to denote texts of Irish provenance.
23 K. Hughes, 'Where Are the Writings of Early Scotland?'
24 Sims-Williams, 'Uses of Writing', p. 20.
25 *HE*, i.1 (this is noted by Forsyth, 'Literacy in Pictland', pp. 41–2).
26 *HE*, v.21 (Forsyth, 'Literacy in Pictland', p. 42).

extant Irish chronicles are derived.[27] Occasional later copies of earlier works have also survived. A late seventh-century date for the first draft of the political tract known as *Senchas Fer nAlban* has been postulated.[28] A genealogical survey of sorts, listing various peoples, its precise administrative purpose is not entirely clear and it has no known parallel.[29] Generically more familiar is a Pictish origin legend, *Do Bunad Cruithnech*: assigned a possible date range from the mid-ninth century to the mid-eleventh, it is difficult to determine the period to which its detailed division of the Pictish kingdom refers.[30] To these Latin and vernacular texts may be added a further linguistic layer towards the end of our period, since Norse appears to have become the language of Orkney and Shetland by the mid-ninth century.[31] Norse texts pertaining to these Scottish territories are late, however, and their provenance mainly Scandinavian.[32] Moreover, since Pictish itself has survived only in place names, the complex linguistic situation is not fully reflected in the few extant texts.

A further linguistic complexity lies in the fact that southern Scotland was Brittonic-speaking and that what some scholars would claim to be one of the oldest poems in Welsh, *Y Gododdin*, emanates from this precise territory.[33] A heroic elegy to the three hundred or so men from Manaw Gododdin, the area around the Firth of Forth, this poem, attributed to Aneirin, survives in a single thirteenth-century manuscript and is difficult to date.[34] This kingdom was one of a number of interconnected dynasties forming 'Yr Hen Ogledd' (The Old North), whose Brittonic dialect of Cumbric was closely related to what later became Welsh. Early material emanating from Gododdin and from the neighbouring regions of Rheged and Strathclyde may well have been transferred to Wales. The long, complex composition ascribed to Aneirin, as well as thematically related verse attributed to his sixth-century contemporary,

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27 K. Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 115–22, building on Bannerman, 'Notes on the Scottish Entries'. This bald statement greatly oversimplifies a complex process, for which see Charles-Edwards (trans.), *Chronicle of Ireland*, vol. I, pp. 1–59; and N. Evans, *The Present and the Past*.

28 Edited by Bannerman in *Studies*, pp. 27–156; see also Dumville, 'Ireland and North Britain'.

29 A. Woolf has termed it 'in part a sort of census document' (*From Pictland to Alba*, p. 7).

30 See, e.g., *ibid*., pp. 10–11; and Broun, 'Alba'.

31 Barnes, *Norn Language*.

32 For translations of a number of these, see T. O. Clancy (ed.), *Triumph Tree*, pp. 146–51, 164–76, 190–211, 215–35.

33 This is provocatively encapsulated by Jackson in his translation entitled *The Gododdin: The Oldest Scottish Poem*.

34 See further Chapter 26 below.

Taliesin, bear the hallmarks of later work.[35] This is not to deny that literature was being produced in this area at an early period. *Historia Brittonum* [*The History of the Britons*], originally written in the ninth century, contains a well-known passage referring to a flowering of poetry in the time of King Ida of Northumbria in the middle of the sixth century. Among the five poets named are Aneirin and Taliesin, who 'simul uno tempore in poemate brittannico claruerunt' [at one and the same time were renowned in British poetry].[36] Their precise connection with the powerful heroic verse bearing their names extant in later Welsh manuscripts must perforce remain unclear.

King Ida's contemporary, Gildas, also makes indirect reference to vernacular Welsh literature, objecting in his accustomed polemical tone to the fact that Maelgwn, king of Gwynedd, was the subject of panegyric. His concern is with eulogy of secular rulers, rather than with the language in which such flattery is given,[37] and his incidental comments constitute valuable evidence for the production of praise poetry in Welsh in his time. Whether such verse was written down is another matter, but Welsh was certainly being committed to vellum when the *Historia Brittonum* was first composed. A series of important marginalia in both Latin and Welsh has been preserved in a Gospel book which was at Llandeilo Fawr in the early ninth century but was transferred to Lichfield perhaps a century or two later, a move to which the manuscript owes its survival.[38] Among the eight marginal texts, the most significant is the 'Surexit' memorandum (so called after the Latin verb with which it begins), which is 'a record of the settlement of a dispute about the right to land',[39] comprising a sanction clause and witness list. A continuous piece of syntactical Welsh (with occasional words in Latin), its significance cannot be overestimated. Closely connected with another marginal note in Latin commemorating the gift of the Gospel book at Teilo's church, its writing has been placed at Llandeilo in the second quarter of the ninth century.[40] A slightly later Welsh manuscript, dating from the second half of the ninth century, also survived by virtue of its having been brought from Wales to

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35 See Isaac, '*Gweith Gwen Ystrat*', and 'Readings'.
36 [Pseudo-]Nennius, *British History*, §62, pp. 37, 38. Aneirin's name is given in its earlier Old Welsh form, 'Neirin'.
37 See Sims-Williams, 'Gildas', p. 177.
38 Called the Book of St Chad after Lichfield's patron, the place of writing of this Gospel book has been debated; for a summary of the arguments, see Jenkins and Owen, 'Welsh Marginalia, Part I', pp. 42–8.
39 Jenkins and Owen, 'Welsh Marginalia, Part II', p. 109.
40 Jenkins and Owen, 'Welsh Marginalia, Part I', pp. 56–61.

England, in the early eleventh century.[41] Containing a Latin summary of the Gospels by the Christian poet Juvencus, Cambridge University Library, MS Ff.4.42 (1285) is heavily glossed and contains a series of stanzas in *englyn* form.[42] Three of these are also ninth century in date, while a further nine have been placed a century later.[43] The three bear a thematic resemblance to *Y Gododdin* in that there is a reference to the drinking of mead, perhaps by warriors. The tone appears nostalgic, a lord complaining that 'mitelu nit gurmaur' [my retinue is not very large], 'namercit mi nep leguenid henoid' [let no one ask me for merriment tonight].[44]

Literature was clearly being written in Wales before 900. However, though more numerous than those of Scottish Dál Riata and Pictland, early manuscript sources from this region too are remarkably thin.[45] Just as early literary production in Scotland had a strong Irish dimension, most notably in the context of Iona, Irish influence has also been detected in Wales to varying degrees. Palaeographically, the two regions have been seen as close at least from the ninth century.[46] This connection is personified in Núadu, the main scribe of the Cambridge Juvencus, whose Irish name may betray his ethnic origin, though he was working in a Welsh scriptorium, as we have seen, and a colophon in his hand, 'araut dinuadu' [a prayer for Núadu], is also in Welsh.[47] Of greater significance in this regard is the presence of Old Irish glosses in the manuscript, alongside others in Latin and Welsh. And while many of the vernacular glosses were copied, not composed, by the manuscript's numerous scribes, it is likely that some at least of those involved in the production were Irish rather than Welsh.[48]

The attraction for Irish scribes of a Welsh scriptorium suggests a productive literary tradition east of the Irish Sea and one with which they would have felt

41 McKee has tentatively suggested that it may have been originally produced in south-east Wales, 'perhaps at Llancarfan or Llanilltud Fawr' (*Cambridge Juvencus Manuscript*, p. 75).

42 For a detailed description of the syllabic metrical form known as *englyn*, see Rowland (ed. and trans.), *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 305–89.

43 Williams, *Beginnings of Welsh Poetry*, p. 100.

44 *Ibid*., p. 90.

45 For a description of extant Welsh manuscripts, see Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*; Sims-Williams lists the majority of the works available in Wales before the middle of the twelfth century ('Uses of Writing', pp. 23–4). Inscriptions have survived from all three areas: for those of Scotland, see Forsyth, 'Literacy in Pictland'. Epigraphic evidence from Wales is gathered in Nash-Williams (ed.), *Early Christian Monuments*; an important example, a stone commemorating a seventh-century king of Gwynedd, Cadfan, has been discussed by Williams, *Beginnings of Welsh Poetry*, pp. 25–40.

46 See, e.g., Bischoff, *Latin Palaeography*, p. 89.

47 For a discussion of this scribe, see McKee, *Cambridge Juvencus Manuscript*, pp. 9–12.

48 This is discussed in detail by Harvey, 'Cambridge Juvencus Glosses'; and McKee, *Cambridge Juvencus Manuscript*, pp. 67–75.

a certain familiarity. In this interdependent cultural context it is inherently unlikely that native Welshmen were first inspired to write their own language by such Irish visitors, as David Greene suggested they were, noting the earlier attestation of vernacular glosses and annotations in Latin manuscripts in Ireland.[49] While Welsh scholars, like their Anglo-Saxon colleagues mentioned by Bede, journeyed to Ireland, the Irish themselves ventured further afield, going to the continent, and to a lesser extent England, presumably with manuscript-filled satchels in hand. In any event, it has been estimated that over fifty Irish manuscripts dating from the first millennium survive as a result, brought to what transpired to be the safer confines of learned centres overseas.[50] And while the vernacular material is secondary in what are first and foremost Latin documents, not surprisingly it bears witness to a wider range of texts than survives in the far more restricted number of extant early Welsh manuscripts.[51]

Notwithstanding the numerical superiority of the Irish documents, they contain no administrative material comparable with the 'Surexit' memorandum and related texts in the Lichfield Gospels. Wales has its closest parallel in Anglo-Saxon England in this regard. The cultural contacts between these two regions are personified by Bishop Asser who lived at the very end of our period and who as biographer of King Alfred achieved lasting fame. Educated in Wales, his agreement with his royal patron allowed him the liberty to return to St David's for lengthy periods. His command of a range of classical sources indicates a conventional learned background. Alfred undoubtedly sought out a scholar with whom he could identify; Asser, for his part, as far as we can tell, felt comfortable in Alfred's Wessex court. This Anglo-Cambrian partnership was productive; moreover, in producing a text to please a foreign paymaster, the Welshman simultaneously designed a text for an audience back home. While so doing he may have encountered a trio of Irishmen, Dub Sláine, Mac Bethad and Máel Inmain, whose journey with neither oar nor rudder across the Irish Sea is related in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year 891; having safely reached the English coast, they made directly for the court of Alfred the Great.[52]

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49 Greene, 'Linguistic Considerations'; Sims-Williams has highlighted the flaws in this argument ('Uses of Writing', pp. 31–2).

50 The figure is from Kenney, *Sources*, p. 9, and has been commented upon by Sims-Williams, 'Uses of Writing', pp. 20–1 (with further references).

51 The content of extant manuscripts containing seventh-, eighth- and ninth-century material in Irish is described in Stokes and Strachan (eds. and trans.), *Thesaurus palaeohibernicus*, vol. I, pp. xiii–xxvi, vol. II, pp. ix–xl.

52 Asser, *Alfred the Great*, ed. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 113–14. See also Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat*, pp. 61–2.

Given the focus of that king's intellectual programme, they would have encountered there vernacular learning alongside its Latin counterpart in a bilingual situation that can only have made the three Irishmen feel at home. Contemporary annalistic records in Old Irish and Old English survive from Alfred's time and earlier, as do vernacular martyrologies[53] and a number of prose compositions, the subject matter of which is, in the case of the Irish material in particular, remarkably diverse.[54] Early poetry has also survived in the two languages: an appropriate Irish equivalent of the book of vernacular verse which Asser claims was given to Alfred by his mother would have been a copy of *Audacht Morainn* [*The Testament of Morann*], a metrical *speculum principum* to which a composition date of *c.* 700 has plausibly been assigned.[55] The rich corpus of Old Irish law tracts contains poetry as well as prose, falling in date somewhere between the law code of the sixth-century Kentish King Æthelberht and the ninth-century laws of Alfred the Great.[56]

This great repository of Irish literature is attested only in manuscripts of the late eleventh century and later. Yet in the case of Ireland, the quantity of glossarial and marginal material in the vernacular found in contemporary Latin manuscripts has ensured that the linguistic contours of Classical Old Irish, a relatively stable learned language in use in the eighth and ninth centuries, are fairly secure. Linguistic dating of texts remains an inexact science; nonetheless, a predominance of Old Irish forms in a text preserved solely in later manuscripts is strongly suggestive of an earlier exemplar. Furthermore, scribes often indicate the source from which copies of a particular text were made. Accordingly, the titles of early vernacular manuscripts are preserved long after the physical codices themselves have been lost. Furthermore, the frequency of the citation of certain manuscript sources allows us to deduce in part what they may have contained. One such heavily quarried manuscript was *Cín Dromma Snechtai* [*The Book of Drumsnat*]. Specifically referred to on five separate occasions in the earliest extant vernacular manuscript, *Lebor na hUidre* [*The Book of the Dun Cow*], a late eleventh-

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53 For connections between English and Irish martyrologies, see Ó Riain, *Anglo-Saxon Ireland* and the references therein, particularly to earlier work by John Hennig. A revised version of this article appears as 'Northumbrian Urtext' in his *Feastdays of the Saints*.

54 For a general account, see Ó Cathasaigh, 'Literature of Medieval Ireland to *c.* 800'; and Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Literature of Medieval Ireland, 800–1200'.

55 F. Kelly (ed. and trans.), *Audacht Morainn*.

56 Irish legal material has been elucidated by F. Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*; for a detailed analysis of the contents of the tracts, see L. Breatnach, *Companion*. A more sustained comparison of Old Irish and Old English writing can be found in Ní Mhaonaigh, '*Légend hÉrenn*'.

century codex from Clonmacnoise,[57] as well as in other contexts, a putative table of contents for this lost 'Book' has been compiled.[58] Encompassing both prose and poetry, it included a generically diverse collection of texts. Seventh- and eighth-century material was included[59] and the original compilation may well be eighth century in date.[60] Exclusively in the vernacular, as far as can be ascertained, *Cín Dromma Snechtai*, even in its absence, is suggestive of a comprehensive literary tradition in Irish at a very early date.

The support of the Church in the production of this literature was crucial: eleventh- and twelfth-century extant vernacular manuscripts whose subject matter is primarily secular came into being in ecclesiastical establishments whose personnel were intimately associated with political rulers upon whose patronage and protection the Church relied.[61] It was in monastic scriptoria that earlier lost manuscripts were also given form, as can be inferred from the link with the monastery of Drumsnat (Co. Monaghan) evident in the title of the lost *Cín* [Book]. The act of writing was a complex, expensive business and ecclesiastical scriptoria served a wider community; the interdependence of king and cleric ensured that scribes applied their skills to the production of texts directed at political rulers, as well as religious material for the edification of the Christian soul. An important social institution, the Church was the provider of education, which undoubtedly involved instruction in reading and writing in Latin. Rhetoric and scriptural

57 See Ó Concheanainn, 'Textual and Historical Associations', esp. pp. 84–6, and 'Further Textual Associations'.

58 Carey, 'Interrelationship', pp. 71–2, building on work by Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage*, p. 17.

59 Carey, 'Interrelationship', p. 91 gives a summary of the dates of the texts.

60 By contrast, Mac Mathúna has argued, in his edition of *Immram Brain*, pp. 425–58, for a tenth-century date on the basis of his reading of the linguistic evidence of one of the tales contained in the manuscript, *Immram Brain* [*The Voyage of Bran*]; McCone's analysis of the textual transmission of this text and its sister narrative, *Echtrae Chonnlai* [*The Adventure of Connlae*], leads him to conclude that 'an eighth-century date for the tantalising *Cín* remains perfectly possible although a tenth-century one cannot be excluded', in McCone (ed.), *Echtrae Chonnlai*, p. 67.

61 *Lebor na hUidre* (Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 E 25) is associated with Clonmacnoise, and one of its three scribes may have been the son of a bishop there: see Best and Bergin (eds.), *Lebor na hUidre*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B502 is linked with Leinster, either Killeshin or Glendalough, where it was put together by a single anonymous scribe *c.* 1120: see, e.g., Bhreathnach, 'Killeshin', p. 43; and the debate concerning its identification with the Book of Glendalough, conducted by Ó Riain and C. Breatnach, to which the most recent contribution is by the latter, 'Manuscript Sources' (with references to the earlier articles). The precise provenance of the late twelfth-century codex, the Book of Leinster (Dublin, Trinity College, MS H. 2. 18), is difficult to determine; however, its scribes were ecclesiastical functionaries, including Áed mac Crimthainn, coarb of Terryglass, and Bishop Finn, who may have been a bishop of Kildare who died in 1160: see Best *et al.* (eds.), *Book of Leinster*.

learning were important parts of the curriculum, as was grammar. The common exegetical tools for analysis of texts (*locus*, *tempus*, *persona*, *causa scribendi*) were frequently employed.[62]

Ecclesiastically trained scholars applied their rigorous learning to a variety of topics. Towards the end of our period, Máel Muru of the monastery of Fahan, Co. Donegal, composed a pseudo-historical poem, *Can a mbunadas na nGáedel* [*Whence the Origins of the Irish?*] in which the biblical wanderings of the Irish and their eventual conquest of Ireland are described at length.[63] He was accorded the title 'rígfile Érenn' [royal poet of Ireland] on his death in 887. The term *file* (pl. *filid*) signified a privileged, learned person, whose status is discussed in detail in two eighth-century legal texts, *Uraicecht Becc* [*Small Primer*][64] and *Uraicecht na Ríar* [*The Primer of Stipulations*].[65] As Liam Breatnach has demonstrated, the seven main grades and four sub-grades into which this category is divided, according to the latter tract, deliberately mirror the grades of the Church.[66] Such parallel hierarchies underline the extent to which the work of all learned practitioners and the Church was intertwined. This view was propounded by the learned practitioners themselves in their occasional accounts of how their cultural world operated on the ground. An eighth-century author composed a prologue to an earlier collection of legal tracts known as the *Senchas Már* [*Great Lore*], in which he relates how a consortium of nine men was chosen to arrange the laws in book form.[67] Representing what were regarded as the key strands of medieval Irish cultural life, three bishops, three kings and three men of learning are said to have undertaken the task,[68] producing a work whose ingenious, deliberately ambiguous title *Nófis* [*New/Nine-Knowledge*] was designed to emphasize the synergy which characterized the creation of the *Senchas Már*.[69]

These same three strands become one in some of those engaged in learning. These include Cormac mac Cuilennáin who first came to attention on his succession to the kingship of Ireland's southernmost kingdom, Munster, at

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62 For a sensitive discussion of the early Irish educational system, see T. Charles-Edwards, 'Context and Uses of Literacy'.
63 Best *et al.* (eds.), *Book of Leinster*, vol. III, pp. 516–23.
64 Binchy, 'Date and Provenance of *Uraicecht Becc*'.
65 Breatnach (ed. and trans.), *Uraicecht na Ríar*.
66 *Ibid*.
67 Carey (ed. and trans.), 'Pseudo-Historical Prologue'. For a discussion of the date, see McCone, 'Dubthach'; and Carey, 'Two Laws'.
68 Carey (ed. and trans.), 'Pseudo-Historical Prologue', §8, pp. 12, 19.
69 *Nó-fis* derives from *noí-fis*, literally 'nine-knowledge', a fanciful etymology of *nós* [custom, law] of a type commonly concocted in medieval Irish texts: see *ibid*., p. 26.

the very end of our period in 901.[70] In his mid-sixties at that stage, he already had an episcopal career behind him. His relatively short seven-year rule as political leader was spent mainly campaigning against his northern counterpart, Flann mac Maíl Shechnaill.[71] In 908 he died fighting him in battle in what was a sharp, swift end to his secular career.[72] While it is as a distinguished king he is celebrated in his obituaries, some chroniclers recall other sides of his multi-faceted life, describing him as 'scriba optimus, atque episcopus, et ancorita, et sapientissimus Gaoidiol' [a most excellent scribe and bishop and anchorite, and the wisest of the Irish].[73] Later authors build on this reputation[74] and a number of eleventh- and twelfth-century poems are ascribed to him.[75] He has long been associated with a ninth-century learned compendium, *Sanas Cormaic* [Cormac's Glossary], as its title suggests, and a case for his authorship of *Amra Senáin*, an obscure poetic eulogy of St Senán, has also been made.[76] A stanza from this work is attributed to Cormac in *Trefhocul*,[77] a tenth-century metrical tract which similarly attributes other stanzas to Cormac, some of which are also preserved in the Glossary bearing his name.

Whatever the precise extent of his own oeuvre, in his life and work Cormac neatly epitomizes the nature of Ireland's elite intellectual culture around the year 900. An ecclesiastic who functioned at a high level also in the secular sphere, his learning reflects the integrated world in which contemporary writing took form. Producing texts in the vernacular, his background was nonetheless Latinate, and he personifies the bilingualism which was a domi-nant feature of this literary age. More significantly, in sophistication and learning he exemplifies a well-established written culture, confident in demeanour and ambitious in its aims. Well supported by royalty and reli-gious, the art of writing had become a mainstay of society's upper echelons,

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70 Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), *Annals of Inisfallen*, pp. 140–1 (901).
71 See, e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 142–3 (907).
72 He was slain in the Battle of Mag nAilbi, also known as the Battle of Belach Mugna: *ibid.*, pp. 144–5 (908).
73 Hennessy (ed. and trans.), *Chronicum Scotorum*, pp. 180–1. In a three-stanza vernacular poem on the battle with which the annalist concludes (pp. 182–3), Cormac is termed 'in tepscop, an tanmchara' [the bishop, the confessor], as well as 'an suí ba sochla fordarc' [the renowned, illustrious sage].
74 In an eleventh-century compilation, the Fragmentary Annals of Ireland, he is exalted as 'an duine naoimh as móo eangnamh táinig ocus tiocfa d'fearaibh Eireann go bráth' [the wisest holy man who has come and who will ever come from the men of Ireland]: Radner (ed. and trans.), *Fragmentary Annals*, §423.
75 For a discussion of Cormac and his literary oeuvre, see Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Cormac mac Cuilennáin'.
76 Breatnach (ed. and trans.), 'Amra Senáin', pp. 20–3.
77 The particular stanza (7) is *ibid.*, pp. 25–6.

king-bishops like Cormac demonstrating how ecclesiastical and secular were closely interlinked.

Cultural interdependence between secular and religious had long since been a feature of Ireland's intellectual life. Some three hundred years before Cormac mac Cuilennáin died, another scholar who straddled both spheres composed poetry which now constitutes some of the earliest extant Irish verse. Its author, Colmán mac Lénéni, is best known as the founder of the monastery of Cloyne, in modern-day Co. Cork.[78] He also engaged with royalty: a poem expressing gratitude for the gift of a sword to Domnall, son of the Uí Néill king Áed mac Ainmirech, has survived. While a cleric, he expressed condemnation of the death of another northern king, Áed Sláine, who was murdered in 604, a mere two years or so before Colmán's own demise.[79] Acknowledging the duality of his role, learned successors termed Colmán *athláech* (literally 'an ex-layman'), recognizing his career both as *láech* (Latin *laicus*) and a cleric. He was not unique in this regard: the eighth- or ninth-century text labelling him in this way alleges that he was one of a trio of such men, and a fourth *athláech* is named elsewhere in the same work.[80] All are prominent clerics associated with the early stages of conversion in Ireland. In Colmán and his associates, St Énna of Aran, Mochammóc of Scattery Island and Bishop Erc of Slane, learned authors saw the founding fathers of their cultural world.

As the birth of literature was placed in the hands of Christian clerics, the origin of their language, Irish, was set in the wider context of a Latinate, learned world. This is expressed most eloquently in an eighth-century poetic manual, *Auraicept na nÉces* [*The Poets' Primer*]. Taking the widespread doctrine of the three sacred languages, Hebrew, Latin and Greek, as his starting point, the author of the *Auraicept* skilfully placed his own tongue among them by describing how it was invented ten years after the dispersal at the Tower by Fénius Farrsaid who was asked to create a language out of many languages.[81] This he did: 'a mba ferr íarum do cach bérlu ocus a mba lethu ocus a mba caímiu, is ed do-reped isin nGoídilc' [what was best then of every language and what was widest and finest was cut out into Irish].[82] His cultural confidence is further reflected in the Greek derivation he assigns to this master-language: 'Goídelc . . . ó Goídiul mac Angin . . . do Grécaib' [Goídelc (Irish) . . .

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78 His work is discussed by Thurneysen, 'Colmān mac Lēnēni'.
79 *Ibid.*, pp. 201–2.
80 Kuno Meyer (ed.), 'Conall Corc', p. 60 (lines 19–20, 21).
81 Ahlqvist (ed. and trans.), *Early Irish Linguist*, p. 47.
82 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

named after Goídel son of Angen . . . of the Greeks].[83] Moreover, it permeates his sustained comparison between Latin and Irish in which the vernacular is seen to be equal in status with its classical counterpart.[84]

This scholarly sophistication bespeaks an intense engagement with Irish as a literary language, as well as an intimate acquaintance with Latin. Contact between them more than three hundred years previously had brought the earliest form of Irish writing, ogam, into being, the inventors of which were familiar not merely with the Latin alphabet but with the works of fourth-century Latin grammarians as well.[85] While undoubtedly indebted to Latin, these earlier creators of what was an epigraphic script display something of the attitude of the *Auraicept* author, Damian McManus having underlined their 'independence of mind' which ensured that ogam was the perfect vehicle for the phonemic inventory of their own tongue.[86] They brought it with them: ogam inscriptions have been preserved in many parts of Wales where the Irish are known to have settled. Significantly, many of these monuments are bilingual, commemoration in ogam being combined with a Latin dedication, addressing a dual audience of fellow Irishman and Briton neighbour at the same time. By contrast, the epigraphic tradition of Wales was both Latinate and Latin, displaying Romano-British influence, though as Patrick Sims-Williams has noted, it is found throughout western, central and northern Wales, as well as the romanized south-eastern region.[87] Roman alphabet and ogam inscriptions also survive in Pictland, with the latter in the majority.[88] While many of these are obscure and consist in the main of personal names (like their Irish counterparts), occasional formulas such as 'MAQQ' [son of] link them closely with the more numerous ogam inscriptions in the southern half of Ireland. These too, then, were vernacular documents, for the most part in stone and stand alongside the numerous Pictish symbol stones which communicated in a different, though by no means less eloquent, way.[89]

Continuity between Pictish carving in whatever form and later written documents is difficult to trace. In Ireland, however, owing to the wealth of extant evidence in Primitive Irish, the language of the framers of ogam, in

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83 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
84 *Ibid.*, p. 49.
85 See McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, pp. 27–31.
86 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
87 Sims-Williams, 'Uses of Writing', p. 18.
88 Forsyth has estimated that there are 'three-and-a-half times as many ogam as roman inscriptions' there ('Literacy in Pictland', p. 54).
89 Forsyth views these symbol stones also as a kind of script ('Some Thoughts').

the form of the inscriptions themselves, as well as in Archaic Irish (600–700) and Old Irish (700–900) in early manuscript sources, it is clear that those drafting the later seventh-century ogam inscriptions and the early manuscript scribes 'must have been one and the same people'.[90] Not surprisingly, therefore, reverence for ogam is evident in a variety of texts.[91] Chief among these is *Auraicept na nÉces*, since it is with the *beithe-luis-nin* or alphabet of ogam that Latin is frequently compared.[92] Yet by the time this text was composed, ogam was no longer being used in inscriptions, though the script was occasionally employed in manuscripts to provide an illustration of how it appeared, and it is found in authorial inscriptions[93] and in short functional texts on other kinds of material as well.[94] However, neither these scholastic ogams, as they are termed, nor the ogam inscriptions themselves record anything comparable with the section of *The Dream of the Rood* carved in eighth-century runes on the Ruthwell Cross, significantly located in Dumfriesshire which was taken over by the English of Northumbria *c.* 700. Poetic compositions in Ireland, as in England for the most part, belonged on the manuscript page.

A significant number of such pages contained early poetry, as far as Ireland is concerned, though this too has mainly been preserved only in later manuscripts. Nonetheless, on linguistic grounds, James Carney has estimated that about 15,000 lines of verse survive from the period down to *c.* 900.[95] The dating of some of the items in question is controversial: for example, the versified biblical history *Saltair na Rann* [*The Psalter of the Quatrains*] most likely belongs to the tenth century rather than to the ninth to which Carney assigned it.[96] Notwithstanding this uncertainty in the case of particular poems, a large corpus of material of early date remains. Moreover, its variety is striking. The dual secular and religious nature of Colmán mac Lénéni's verse sets the pattern. From the seventh century, genealogical poetry pertaining to the eastern territory of Leinster has

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90 McManus, 'Ogam', p. 13; see also Harvey, 'Early Literacy'.
91 See McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, pp. 148–66.
92 Ahlqvist (ed. and trans.), *Early Irish Linguist*, p. 48. The term *beithe-luis-nin* derives from the names designating three letters of the ogam alphabet: *beithe* [birch], *luis* [herb], *nin* [fork].
93 Sims-Williams has drawn attention to the use of an ogam authorial inscription in a copy of a late tenth-century book by Byrthferth of Ramsey ('Byrthferth's Ogam Signature').
94 See McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, pp. 129–40.
95 Carney, 'Early Irish Verse', pp. 177–8 (list), 181–7 (discussion of dating).
96 It is uncertain, however, as to whether these one hundred and fifty quatrains were the work of Airbertach mac Coisse Dobráin (d. 988), as Mac Eoin suggested in 'Date and Authorship'; see also Carney, 'Early Irish Verse', pp. 207–16.

survived.[97] Fragmentary material concerning some of the characters celebrated in the later narrative, *Táin Bó Cúailnge* [*The Cattle-Raid of Cúailnge*], similarly comes down to us from this time. Queen Medb is the focus of one such relatively obscure poem,[98] while another, a prophecy, is put into the mouth of Scáthach, Cú Chulainn's female weapon-instructor.[99] Both of these compositions employ an accentual metre termed *rosc*, the main characteristics of which are a particular number of stressed words per line coupled with linking alliteration. The majority of these poems, however, are composed in a range of syllabic metres, a fixed number of syllables per line being the primary feature, and having end-rhyme and other types of rhyme. The metre of Latin hymns, it was also adopted in vernacular eulogies to saints, such as Columba and Brigit, to both of whom a number of hymns survive.[100] Stanzaic, syllabic poetry is also used for biblical material, as evidenced by a vibrant, vital poetic version of the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas which was composed in the early eighth century.[101] A versified, lengthy biography of Christ attributed to a named author, Blathmacc, whose father, Cú Brettan, was alive in 750, is extant. In it Christ is an Irish hero, betrayed by Judas in an act which is described in very specific legal terms as *fingal* [kinslaying] and keened by his mother Mary in a particularly Irish way.[102]

Blathmacc's work comes down to us remarkably unchanged in a seventeenth-century manuscript, its somewhat modernized orthography disguising but not destroying its eighth-century form. It can be profitably compared with the few important poems that have survived in contemporary manuscripts, often marginal, but nonetheless diverse in content and tone. Their creative playfulness is illustrated in one famous example from an eighth- or ninth-century manuscript, Codex sancti Pauli, an artistic homage to a cat.[103] Irony has also been mastered, a ninth-century weary pilgrim

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97 Ó Corráin, 'Irish Origin Legends', pp. 57–65; the evidence does not warrant the very early fifth-century date James Carney assigned to some of this and other material: see his 'Archaic Irish Verse' and his edition 'Three Old Irish Accentual Poems'.

98 P. L. Henry (ed. and trans.), 'Conailla Medb Míchuru' [Medb Enjoined the Evil Contracts].

99 P. L. Henry (ed. and trans.), 'Verba Scáthaige' ['The Words of Scáthach']. This poem was contained in *Cín Dromma Snechtai*.

100 F. Kelly (ed. and trans.), 'Poem in Praise of Columb Cille', and 'Tiughraind Bhécáin'; Stokes and Strachan (eds. and trans.), *Thesaurus palaeohibernicus*, vol. II, pp. 325–6 (*Birgit Bé Bithmaith* [*Brigit, Ever Excellent Woman*]).

101 Carney (ed. and trans.), *Poems of Blathmacc*, pp. 90–105; McNamara *et al.* (eds.), *Apocrypha Hiberniae*, pp. xiii, 455–83.

102 Carney (ed. and trans.), *Poems of Blathmacc*, p. 36 (reference to *fingal*).

103 Stokes and Strachan (eds. and trans.), *Thesaurus palaeohibernicus*, vol. II, pp. xxxii–xxxiv, 293–6. The poem on the celebrated cat, Pangur Bán, has been much anthologized: see,

suggesting that a journey to Rome amounts to 'mór saído, becc torbai' [a lot of work (for) little profit], continuing 'in Rí chondaigi hi foss / mani mbera latt ní fogbai' [the King you seek here – if you don't bring him with you, you won't find him].[104] The kind of pilgrimage our clever poet castigates ensured that manuscripts which were brought abroad were not in fact lost. Such journeys continued to the end of our period, learned authors like Sedulius Scottus (fl. 850)[105] and Johannes Scottus Eriugena (810–77) having productive careers at the court of Charles the Bald. Eriugena, in particular, in part because of his striking originality, has often been studied as a scholar apart.[106] Yet, he and his fellow exiles continued to influence thinking in their homeland, not least through contact with travellers who may have returned to Ireland bearing gifts from abroad.

For various reasons, however, the lure of the continent may have been temporarily waning, as indicated by the aspersions cast on the once revered trip to Rome. The focus of one group of eighth-century monks who called themselves 'céli Dé' [God's companions] was an austere life of fasting and prayer at home.[107] What is striking about their writing is their wholesale use of the vernacular in devotional works, which has been linked with their desire to communicate with the laity in their attempt to promote a purer, ascetic, more spiritual way of life.[108] Blathmacc has been claimed to be of their number,[109] though this is far from certain; Óengus mac Óengobann, the author of *Félire Óengusso* [*The Calendar of Óengus*], a ninth-century vernacular martyrology, is more likely to have been.[110] Not only does he call himself 'céle Dé' but he was taught by the pre-eminent ecclesiastic among them, Máel Rúain, founder of the monastery of Tallaght. A shift towards the vernacular is noticeable in other genres also from the ninth century. Óengus's *Félire* served as a companion piece to hagiography, the earliest predominantly vernacular example of which, *Bethu Brigte* [*The Life of Brigit*], is also ninth century in date and is in

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e.g., Murphy (ed. and trans.), *Early Irish Lyrics*, pp. 2–3 (no. 1) and Greene and O'Connor (eds. and trans.), *Golden Treasury*, pp. 81–3 (no. 17). For commentary, see Toner, 'Messe ocus Pangur Bán'.

104 Stokes and Strachan (eds. and trans.), *Thesaurus palaeohibernicus*, vol. II, pp. xxiv, 296.

105 His considerable body of Latin poetry is discussed by Doherty, 'Latin Writing in Ireland', pp. 117–23, 139–40.

106 His best-known work is *De divisione naturae* [*On the Divisions of Nature*] or *Periphyseon*, which brings Neoplatonic and Christian ideas together in a distinctive way.

107 Carey (trans.), *King of Mysteries*, introduces them briefly and translates some of their writings (pp. 14–15, 246–58).

108 See, e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

109 Lambkin, 'Blathmacc'.

110 Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Félire*.

fact a bilingual text, of which roughly one quarter is in Latin.[111] That most central of curriculum subjects, biblical commentary, is similarly attested in the vernacular from this time.[112] Annalistic writing in which secular as well as ecclesiastical events are recorded was previously mainly in Latin; Irish is used in chronicles with increasing frequency from the ninth century and this linguistic change may be linked with more detailed recording which is also noticeable from this time.[113]

Needless to say, complex cultural changes too must underlie this spread in use of the vernacular, three or four hundred years after Christianity first came. It is a feature of some genres more than others; with the exception of canon law, legal material was written in Irish and in large quantity already in the seventh and eighth centuries. About fifty texts dating from this period form a collection, the *Senchas Már*, including material on clientship, marriage and kinship, as well as bees, cats and dogs. Neighbourly relations are regulated for, as is sick-maintenance of all kinds; arrangements for the proper conduct of society are pursued.[114] Having northern associations, the *Senchas Már* is complemented by a smaller group of texts emanating from Munster in the south which appears to have been more restricted in range.[115] The southern sources may also be stylistically distinguishable from the *Senchas Már* material, containing a greater proportion of the alliterative, stress-counting metre, *rosc*, which we have already encountered. Thus, they are often deemed the products of a poetico-legal school.

Written in a similar style and also in the vernacular is *Audacht Morainn*, poetic advice to an aspiring king.[116] The same constituency, as well as their subjects presumably, were addressed in a prophetic king-list, *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* [*The Vision of Conn Cétchathach* (of the hundred battles)], which was composed about the same time.[117] Elaborate, stylized Irish is a feature of other king tales: legal dialogue in *rosc* forms the central part of the

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111 Ó hAodha (ed. and trans.), *Bethu Brigte*.
112 Meyer (ed. and trans.), *Hibernica minora*.
113 This is clearly an oversimplification since the degree of use of the vernacular depended above all on the practice of a given annalist, and a shift can be seen to have taken place in individual compilations at somewhat different times: see Dumville, 'Latin and Irish', which includes a brief comparison of Irish and English vernacular annalistic writing (pp. 333–4).
114 See F. Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*.
115 It includes *Cáin Fhuithirbe* [*The Law of Fuithirbe*], the earliest datable law text, composed about 680: see L. Breatnach, 'Ecclesiastical Element'.
116 F. Kelly (ed. and trans.), *Audacht Morainn*.
117 It too was contained in *Cín Dromma Snechtai*; it was in the late seventh century that the last ruler mentioned in the text, Fínnechta Fledach, reigned: see G. Murphy, 'Dates of Two Sources', pp. 145–51.

seventh- or eighth-century narrative, *Immathchor nAilella ocus Airt* [*The Mutual Restitution between Ailill and Art*].[118] A powerful eighth-century poem put into the mouth of the Ulster king, Conchobar mac Nessa, on his hearing of the Crucifixion, has survived as part of *Aided Conchobair* [*Conchobar's Death-tale*].[119]

This narrative is in fact the story of Conchobar's conversion, a topic which continued to concern the Irish for some time after the coming of St Patrick in the fifth century. Patrick himself is presented as emerging triumphant, dramatically defeating the pagan king Láegaire and his druids in one seventh-century version of his Life.[120] His forceful persona in this Latin hagiography stands in stark contrast to the more thoughtful spirituality of his own writings, the significance of which lies further in the fact that his 'Confession' and 'Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus' constitute Ireland's earliest written texts.[121] The theme is explored more sensitively in a pair of interconnected eighth-century voyage tales, *Echtrae Chonnlai* [*The Expedition of Connlae*] and *Immram Brain* [*The Voyage of Bran*].[122] Featuring supernatural women who lure unsuspecting men to an otherworld of unparalleled pleasures, expectations are spectacularly subverted in *Echtrae Chonnlai*, since the woman herself is the harbinger of Christianity, and heaven is her natural home.[123] The coming of Christ is foretold in Bran's voyage tale by the god of the sea, Manannán mac Lir. Exploring the issues of perception and reality skilfully, the author invokes an omnipresent, all-powerful God who is a less benevolent figure than in *Echtrae Chonnlai*. After the first flush of conversion, the complexities of Christian living come to the fore. *Apgitir Chrábaid* [*The Alphabet of Piety*], a didactic, religious text which is ascribed to the abbot Colmán moccu Beognae (died 611), but which may have been written a century or so after his death, addresses some of the difficulties in ornate rhythmical vernacular prose. A spiritual primer, with its polished manner it gets its moral message effectively across.[124]

Bede, the moral didact, would certainly have approved; his positive view of the Irish, had he been in a position to read *Apgitir Chrábaid*, would only

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118 Corthals (ed. and trans.), 'Affiliation of Children'.
119 Corthals (ed. and trans.), 'Rhetoric'.
120 *Vita Patricii* by Muirchú, in Bieler (ed. and trans.), *Patrician Texts*, pp. 84–99.
121 Patrick, *Libri epistolarum*; the 'Confession' in Chapter 5 below.
122 McCone (ed. and trans.), *Echtrae Chonnlai*; and Mac Mathúna (ed. and trans.), *Immram Brain*. On their date, see the former, pp. 29–47.
123 McCone (ed. and trans.), *Echtrae Chonnlai*, §11, pp. 122, 178.
124 For the text, see Vernam Hull (ed. and trans.), 'Apgitir Chrábaid'. Its date continues to be debated: see, e.g., Ó Néill, 'Date and Authorship'; and McCone, 'Prehistoric', pp. 34–5.

have been enforced. Literary exchanges undoubtedly formed part of the intense contact between Ireland and England in Bede's own time and later and it may be that their eastern neighbours learned much from the confident control the Irish had of their own written tongue. Literary evidence from Wales in our period is scanty and that from what we now know as Scotland scarcely visible; nonetheless the indications are that writing was an important activity in these regions. If our picture of the early literature of Wales and Scotland resembles somewhat faded etchings, that of literary production in Ireland is made of vibrant, multicoloured paint. A complex picture emerges: contemporary manuscript evidence suggests a dominance of Latin which is mediated somewhat by consideration of material which has survived only in later copies; yet intense cultivation of the vernacular was characteristic of Irish learning from an early period and is indicative of the close co-operation between ecclesiastical and secular spheres which is the defining feature of early Irish cultural life. While production of texts of all kinds was firmly ensconced in an ecclesiastical embrace, it seems likely that (pseudo-)historical material was written for, and indeed may have been specifically commissioned by, political rulers. It was in the vernacular, therefore, that such material was written from a very early date. There was payback for the Church; it played an increasingly important role in the inauguration of kings, as our period progressed. Its involvement in legal writing ensured influence in the matter of regulating society. This active collaboration between Church and 'state', eloquently described in one law text as 'comúaim n-ecalsa fri túaith' [the sewing together of Church and secular authority], benefited all.[125] How typical the Irish situation was of other areas of Britain is difficult to gauge in the absence of comparable evidence from Wales, Scotland and even Anglo-Saxon England. Nonetheless, following Bede in viewing the 'five languages and four nations' of Britain side by side ensures that the varying pieces of evidence of 'English, British, Irish and Picts' can illuminate each other (*HE*, i.i). In presenting here the earliest literary evidence from Ireland, Scotland and Wales, I hope to have cast the texts of their nearest neighbours, the Anglo-Saxons, in a somewhat different light.

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125 This is the phrase used in the eighth-century law tract *Córus Béscnai* [*The Prescribed Arrangement of Custom*]: Binchy (ed.), *Corpus iuris Hibernici*, 529.4; see McCone, *Pagan Past*, pp. 25–6. It is echoed in the pseudo-historical Prologue (McCone, 'Dubthach', pp. 21–3).

Chapter 5

Insular Latin literature to 900

ROSALIND LOVE

The history of Insular Latin literature is inextricably linked to the story of the establishment and growth of the Church. All the surviving texts with which this chapter deals were composed by those who were in holy orders or had taken monastic vows; their overall focus is God-ward, their guide the Scriptures, their agenda the spread of the faith and the carrying out of the Church's business. The centrality of the Latin Bible, the need to maintain daily prayer, the sacraments and preaching, and therefore the requirement to educate those charged with doing these things, ensured the language's continued prevalence and relative linguistic stability. Up to a point, Latin also became, and remained, the preferred language for some kinds of official transaction, such as royal diplomas. To stop there, how-ever, would be to suggest a purely utilitarian attitude to Latin literacy. Its high status is due to factors beyond pragmatism: the desire for continuity with the early Church in the West and with the writings of its most cultured figures; the aesthetic appeal of the monuments of classical Latin literature which made their way to Britain and Ireland; even simply the sheer joy of excelling in a language so distinct from one's native tongue and the yearning to honour the Almighty with works of carefully crafted beauty.

The fact that the inhabitants of Britain and Ireland succeeded in compos-ing Latin literature that is diverse and full of interest owes plenty to those who taught or influenced them, as well as to the earlier books they were able to acquire. It is also a mark of their innate gifts of insight and imagination. This chapter is concerned principally with Latin prose and poetry written in England or by Anglo-Saxons elsewhere, up to 900. Yet, considering its importance at a formative stage in England's cultural development, works written in Ireland or by the Irish will also be considered, where they are not covered elsewhere in this volume. In the background, too, is the earliest phase of Britain's known literary history, namely Latin works produced by

British authors towards the close of the period of Rome's control and as the Empire disintegrated and the Germanic peoples began to settle in Britain. Latin written in Wales later must also play a part in the narrative. The contribution of Insular authors was extremely important for the transmission of Latin culture from antiquity, both classical and Christian, to the later Middle Ages, yet it would be mistaken to regard the literature of this early period as simply a bridge from one high point of literary history to the next. It was productive, inventive, and aspired to leave monuments of its own.[1]

Before and despite the Anglo-Saxons: British Latin

The British authors whose writings survive are in various ways a force to be reckoned with, namely Pelagius, who left Britain for Rome in the last quarter of the fourth century, Patrick, whose earliest education was at home in fifth-century Britain, and Gildas, active around the middle of the sixth century and offering a grim perspective on the dawn of the Anglo-Saxon era.[2] To them we should add the less familiar name of Faustus, by birth a Briton, though he passed most of his career in Gaul, as abbot at Lérins and then bishop of Riez, until 477, when he was forced into exile. All of these men have left us letters or treatises focused on moral and spiritual matters, their drive monasticism's steady westward spread. Pelagius and Faustus wrote competent, indeed skilful Latin, witness to the quality of the educational system in late Roman Britain; and evidence for the survival of that system in some form is the extraordinarily vigorous and challenging Latin of Gildas' lengthy *De excidio Britanniae*. Patrick, writing his *Confession* towards the end of the fifth century, in Latin that occasionally struggles for coherence yet still communicates powerfully, as befits an evangelist, pointedly contrasts himself with the 'rhetorici' whom he addresses (*Confession*, chap. 13).[3] These the Almighty passed over for mission work, preferring Patrick, whose formal education was disrupted by captivity in Ireland, but presumably the likes of Pelagius, Faustus and later Gildas were just such highly educated men, who had gained a rhetorical training in Britain. Though he may not have mastered the niceties of high style, Patrick nevertheless shows himself to be skilful at crafting words that hit home: 'audite et scrutamini: quis me stultum excitauit de medio eorum qui uidentur esse

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1 There is no detailed history of early Insular Latin literature, but see Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899*; and, for Celtic Latin, Lapidge and Sharpe, *Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature*. For a checklist of named authors, see Sharpe, *Handlist*.

2 See T. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 176–81, 202–9, 214–33; and Orchard, 'Latin and the Vernacular Languages', pp. 191–200.

3 Patrick, *Libri epistolarum*, p. 64.

sapientes et legis periti et potentes in sermone . . . et me quidem, detestabilis huius mundi, prae ceteris inspirauit?' [Listen and consider: who raised up me, the stupid one, from the midst of those who seem wise and skilled in the law and powerful in speech . . . and before all the rest inspired me, indeed, detestable to this world?][4] Much of Gildas' convoluted prose contrasts strongly with the simple structures of Patrick's, yet amid the complex periodic style and poeticism, he too had quick-fire weapons in his armoury, raining questions on the rulers and clergy he rails against.

From a literary point of view, Gildas' polemic against his fellow Britons, his ornate prose coupled with fearless admonition, probably had the longest echo, but all these men were influential in their different ways. More generally the British tradition of Latinate learning flowed westwards to Ireland, with men such as Patrick, and then subsequently back round eastwards into England again in the sixth and seventh centuries, 'two great circular movements of men, books, and ideas', as Thomas Charles-Edwards aptly described it.[5]

Getting started with Latin in England

To see Latin composed by the Anglo-Saxons, we shall have to leap to the seventh century for the earliest evidence, but since books and teachers were formative, we should first consider key channels of influence. Obviously Rome, whence the missionaries came to convert the Anglo-Saxons, from the 590s onwards, was an important supplier of books. Later on Benedict Biscop, the founder of Wearmouth (in 674) and then Jarrow, brought volumes home from his journeys to Rome, as Bede records. Italy was not the only source, however: Biscop spent time at Lérins (near Cannes), and it is hard to imagine that he left such an important and ancient centre of learning empty-handed.[6] Contact directly across the Channel at an earlier phase must already have brought exposure to Christian Latin, though, since Bertha, the wife of King Æthelberht of Kent, came from her native Francia bringing her own chaplain, Liudhard, well before the Roman missionaries arrived. As we shall see, Ireland was also an important direction from which books reached the Anglo-Saxons, and by that means, if not via Francia, would eventually come

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4 *Ibid*. (my translation).
5 T. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 290.
6 Bede, *Historia abbatum*, chaps. 2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 15, in *Opera historica*, vol. I, pp. 365, 367, 368–9, 373, 379–80.

Latin works composed in Spain, principally by the prolific bishop of Seville, Isidore (d. 636).

When Gregory the Great dispatched Augustine to convert the Anglo-Saxons, he would have failed in his responsibilities if he had not ensured that successive waves of missionaries were equipped with the books necessary to establish and administer a Church and then to begin staffing it with locals, who needed to learn Latin. Gregory himself may have felt that this was sufficient, but by the later seventh century, cultural aspirations had transcended this functional level, as we shall see, and it is highly likely that access to earlier literature was the spur, so it is worth asking what came to hand. Few books survive from those brought by the Gregorian mission, or indeed from any other source that contributed to the earliest book collections. An important means of gauging the Anglo-Saxons' reading is therefore from references in their own writings.[7] A picture emerges of reasonably good working libraries – Bede out in front with access to an estimated 250 titles – but modest by comparison with those of continental institutions.[8] From the perspective of a history of Insular Latin literature, there is a key point here, as well as a caveat. At all periods authors can be seen inhabiting pre-existing literary genres and contributing to their evolution, as well as developing new literary forms; but what kinds of literature did they not touch, and why? Is it simply because there were important earlier texts that they did not have? From lists of their reading Greek literature is, for the most part, absent, except where it had already been translated into Latin, as are works of philosophy and dialectic, whether in Latin or Greek. We could add drama, satire, fable, secular biography and, for the most part, lyric poetry. But we must be wary of circularity: we know about Bede's reading from what he quotes, so the genres of literature he explored must certainly have been available to him, but what about genres of no relevance to him? We cannot argue from the silence of the works he never quoted or used: did he not have them, or was he simply not interested in them? If in the context of the whole sweep of Western literature we notice the limitations of this period, or perceive literary worlds temporarily sealed off, it is not necessarily because the likes of Bede were ignorant of the possibilities, though they may very well have been, but because this era had its own priorities, different from ours. The choices lay first with those who, responding to economic considerations, decided which books to buy,

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7 See Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, as well as the entries in the *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* database (http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk).
8 Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 34–7 (Wearmouth-Jarrow) and 58–60 (comparative data for the continent).

which to have copied, which to erase to re-use the vellum, and then secondly with the readers of those books who crafted their own literature in response to what they had inherited, but according to their own agenda.

Cultural exchange was not restricted to books: there is plenty of evidence for teachers coming from abroad and students travelling in search of education. Bede reports that John the 'archicantator' came from Rome to teach chanting and reading aloud (*HE*, IV.18 (16), pp. 388–9). As for Anglo-Saxons studying abroad, we have already seen that Benedict Biscop spent at least two years at Lérins. Bede is similarly our source for the story that a seventh-century princess, Eorcengota, great-granddaughter of King Æthelberht, became a nun at Faremoutiers-en-Brie, and that many sent their daughters to study in such places (*HE*, III.8, pp. 236–9). Those who could, fared as far as Rome, where even a fleeting visit could prove inspirational, as may have been the case for the seventh-century author, Aldhelm of Malmesbury. Among his surviving works are some metrical poems dubbed, by their first editor, *Carmina ecclesiastica*.[9] They were composed to mark the consecrations of new churches or altars, perhaps as dedicatory inscriptions. In his recent reassessment of Aldhelm's career, Michael Lapidge suggests that these poems may have been inspired by seeing just such dedicatory verses on display in Rome's churches, and that Aldhelm might even have recorded what he saw, to bring home.[10] This is a very obvious example of the direct influence of earlier models, shaping the production of a literary form that goes beyond the pragmatic to a deliberate demonstration of cultural continuity.

Lapidge also advances the more revolutionary hypothesis that Aldhelm studied at the monastic community established on Iona in 563 by the Irishman Columba.[11] Aldhelm would not be the first to have done so: an account of Columba's life by Adomnán, Iona's ninth abbot, written a century after the saint's death but dependent on earlier materials, mentions the presence of 'Saxones' in Columba's sixth-century community.[12] The Irish foundation was also a safe haven for the exiled Oswald, the future king of Northumbria, who later turned to Iona for help in Christianizing his realm (*HE*, III.3). Ireland itself also exerted a strong pull: Bede recorded that 'in the days of bishops Finan and Colman' (bishops of Lindisfarne in the 650s and 660s), many Anglo-Saxons flocked to visit teachers in Ireland (*HE*, III.27). Aldhelm, in a letter with an outlook otherwise dismissive of Irish scholarship (why go there, he says, when

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9 Aldhelm, *Opera*, pp. 11–32.
10 Lapidge, 'Career of Aldhelm', pp. 52–64.
11 *Ibid*., pp. 26–30.
12 Adomnán, *Life of St Columba*, trans. Sharpe, pp. 213, 223.

we have the best teachers you could wish for here in England?), similarly alludes to fellow countrymen who swarm across the Irish Sea like bees to become students.[13] Aldhelm's disdain aside, it is worth an excursus to look at what we know about seventh-century Latin literature in Ireland, to catch some scent of the blossoming meadow that attracted those swarms.

Scholarship in seventh-century Ireland

Adomnán's presentation of Columba's community on Iona, in the Life already mentioned, emphasizes the making of books, even by the saint himself, to whom two Latin hymns are traditionally ascribed.[14] Even though there is no scholarly consensus about the attribution of those hymns (see below) and we cannot fasten on anything else that was composed by Columba, there is no doubt that he valued scholarship. Columba left Ireland in 563; less than thirty years later he was to be followed in that move by another Columba, otherwise known as Columbanus. His earliest education was at a monastic foundation in County Fermanagh, and then at Bangor, and although most of his extant writings were composed once he had reached the continent never to return, they are still valuable as an indication of his intellectual training.[15] Two poems, a collection of letters and a set of sermons show us a competent, indeed confident, Latinist, who used vigorous rhetoric and vivid imagery to convey his strongly held views.[16] Columbanus wrote approvingly of Gildas, and his letters show the same mixture of ornate prose and uncompromising address, as when he exclaimed at Pope Gregory the Great for countenancing the irregularities (as Columbanus saw them) of the Gaulish bishops: 'I confess that I am amazed that this error of Gaul's has not long since been scraped off by you, like a wart!'[17] Columbanus' letters are far from utilitarian communication, proof that the Ireland he described as 'ultimus', where he had gained his earliest education, was no cultural desert.

That poems are attributed to Columbanus opens up another vista. A manuscript now at Milan, the Antiphonary of Bangor, is a compilation of hymns, canticles and prayers written at Bangor in about 700.[18] Many of the Latin hymns are of demonstrably Irish origin, and they include one, *Precamur patrem* (the opening line, 'We beseech the Father'), which has been shown to

13 Aldhelm, Letter 5 to Heahfrith, in *Opera*, p. 490 (trans. *Prose Works*, p. 161).
14 On Columba's Iona, see T. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, chap. 7.
15 On Columbanus' context, career and writings, see *ibid.*, chap. 8.
16 For an assessment of his letters, see N. Wright, 'Columbanus's *Epistulae*', pp. 29–92.
17 Columbanus, Letter 1, in *Opera*, p. 4.
18 Warren (ed.), *Antiphonary of Bangor*; see also Curran, *Antiphonary of Bangor*.

be by Columbanus.[19] The term hymn tends to conjure up to the modern mind a work of simple poetry, but *Precamur patrem* belongs to an ancient tradition of verse exploring doctrinal matters. It is a sophisticated meditation, through forty-two stanzas, on Christ's role in human history since the Creation.

One of the important features both of *Precamur patrem* and the one other hymn also attributed to Columbanus (*Mundis iste transibit*) is that they are not quantitative metrical poetry but rather rhythmical verse, depending for its structure on stress alone, and on a fixed number of syllables per line. Many other early Hiberno-Latin hymns survive which were composed in this format, a poetic medium that must have seemed more accessible than quantitative verse to authors who had Latin only as an acquired language. The Irish hymnodists did not invent the rhythmical hymn, but they did much to popularize and develop it, from the sixth century onwards.[20] Perhaps the best-known example, which enjoyed a widespread popularity, is the alphabetical twenty-three-stanza *Altus Prosator*, traditionally attributed to Columba.[21] Arguments have been made for and against his authorship, as also of the other hymn connected with his name, *Adiutor laborantium*; the case lacks telling evidence.[22] The content of *Altus Prosator*, like that of *Precamur patrem*, has an ambitious doctrinal sweep, draws on a wide range of sources and uses some abstruse vocabulary. Even if not the work of Columba himself, nonetheless it is very likely to have been composed on Iona, and typifies the vitality of that community's Latinate learning.

A similar impression emerges from an analysis of the somewhat later writings of Columba's biographer, Adomnán. He composed a learned treatise on the topography of the Holy Places, combining material drawn from various patristic sources with what he claimed was the eye-witness account of a Gaulish bishop, Arculf, who visited Iona.[23] Thereby Adomnán was able to test the written information he had about sites such as Jerusalem's Holy Sepulchre against observational evidence. It is just one of many scholarly connections between England and Ireland that Adomnán presented a copy of this work to Aldfrith, king of Northumbria, while on a diplomatic visit in about 688. Bede records the story of this gift, and was instrumental in ensuring the wider transmission of the lore contained within Adomnán's work, producing his own often-copied version of it (and also including excerpts in the

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19 See Lapidge, '*Precamur patrem*'.
20 J. Stevenson, 'Hiberno-Latin Hymns'.
21 See J. Stevenson, '*Altus Prosator*'.
22 Stevenson, *ibid*., rejects Columba's authorship on grounds judged inconclusive by Clancy and Márkus in *Iona*, pp. 39–40. See also Márkus, '*Adiutor laborantium*'.
23 Adomnán, *De locis sanctis*.

Ecclesiastical History, v.16–17).[24] Telling, though, is the fact that Bede felt the need to rewrite what he referred to as Adomnán's tortuous Latin ('lacinioso sermone': literally 'discourse full of folds' or perhaps 'many-layered').[25] Adomnán's otherwise competent Latin was indeed rather mannered, with extensive use of hyperbaton (separating adjectives from their matching nouns) and tangled subordinate clauses, as well as unusual vocabulary introduced for the sake of variation, evidently not quite to Bede's taste.

These stylistic features are even more obvious in Adomnán's other surviving work, his *Life of Columba*.[26] When produced in about 697, the Life was just the most recent in a succession of hagiographical texts composed in the second half of the seventh century to commemorate Ireland's best-loved saints. The others concern Patrick and Brigit and are characterful early contributions to that most prolific of all medieval literary genres.[27] They betray familiarity with the tenets of the genre as established by the important antique models for Christian biography that ensured a degree of monotony from one new Life to the next. Yet at the same time, Cogitosus' *Life of Brigit* and Tírechán's and Muirchú's accounts of Patrick are thoroughly embedded in the political context of their respective homes at Kildare and Armagh.[28] These early texts stand at the head of a long tradition of Christian biography in Ireland, which turned very early to the vernacular as its chief medium. They may also have served as the spur of rivalry which prompted Anglo-Saxon authors to take up the genre in the service of their own saints, beginning a similarly long and robust tradition. One of the earliest Anglo-Latin saints' Lives is that of Cuthbert, written on Lindisfarne not long after his death in 687.[29] It has one or two features which make it remarkably similar in shape and frame of reference to Adomnán's broadly contemporary *Life of Columba*, and this pair of texts serves to remind us that it was out of Iona, in the persons of Aidan and his successors, that Lindisfarne, arguably Northumbria's most famous monastery, was staffed, from the 630s until 664 when the Synod of Whitby ended the intimate connection between the two institutions. Some degree of cultural contact, as we have seen in the case of Adomnán, seems to have continued nonetheless.

Hagiography and hymn-writing were, however, perhaps not the principal reasons why swarms of Anglo-Saxon students congregated around Ireland's

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24 Bede, *De locis sanctis*.
25 *Ibid.*, chap. 19.
26 Adomnán, *Life of Columba*, ed. and trans. Anderson and Anderson; see also Adomnán, *Life of St Columba*, trans. Sharpe.
27 See the survey by Herbert, 'Latin and Vernacular Hagiography'.
28 *Ibid.*, pp. 330–3.
29 Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *Two Lives of St Cuthbert*, pp. 60–139.

teachers, as Aldhelm and Bede described it. Surviving evidence suggests that there were lively centres of learning there at this period. In the mid-twentieth century, the German scholar, Bernhard Bischoff, used his exhaustive knowledge of medieval manuscripts in continental libraries to construct a remarkable list of unpublished, unlocalized and undated texts which he suggested were the work of seventh- and eighth-century Irishmen. These texts are commentaries and aids to biblical study, and theological treatises.[30] Successive scholars have taken up Bischoff's identifications, either to affirm them and to edit the texts in question, or to dismantle the edifice he constructed.[31] Even with all due caution, when we include also the works on Latin grammar and computus that were produced by Irish scholars at this period, there is sufficient to suggest a vibrant intellectual culture.[32] Just three examples must serve to convey some flavour. In 655, an author known only as 'the Irish Augustine' composed the treatise *De mirabilibus sacrae Scripturae*, arguing that the miracles recounted in the Bible did not contravene the laws of nature, but rather showed the Creator working with those laws on his own terms. Thus, when the first plague upon Egypt turned the Nile's waters into blood (Exodus 7:20), this only represented a speeded-up version of the natural processes by which water, within living creatures, daily transforms into urine, saliva, semen, bile, tears, milk and blood.[33] 'What, then, is the obstacle for able minds?' exclaims the Irish Augustine. What indeed? Although this approach can seem naive, for this early period the text's naturalistic perspective is remarkable.[34]

Written at probably much the same period and striking for different reasons are two treatises, *Epitomae* and *Epistolae*, by the author known as Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, whom many (if not all) scholars regard as an Irishman.[35] Posing as a conventional treatment of the parts of speech, Virgilius' compositions turn out to be a fantastical celebration of wisdom and linguistic diversity, wrapped up in a parody of dry grammar books, peopled by a bunch of otherwise unknown authorities such as Galbungus, Gurgilius and Balapsidus. These dodgy characters are presented as coming

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30 Bischoff, 'Wendepunkte'.
31 E.g., Gorman, 'Myth of Hiberno-Latin Exegesis'.
32 On the grammatical materials, see Law, *Insular Latin Grammarians*, chaps. 5, 6.
33 Bischoff, 'Wendepunkte', pp. 268–9 ('Turning-Points', p. 144). There is no accessible modern edition of *De mirabilibus*, which must be read in PL 35, cols. 2149–200 (among the works of Augustine of Hippo), with Exodus 7:20 at cols. 2164–5.
34 For *De mirabilibus* in context, see M. Smyth, *Understanding the Universe*; and Bracken, 'Rationalism and the Bible'.
35 Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, *Epitomi ed epistole*. See Herren, 'New Light'; and, with more caution over Virgilius' Irish identity, Law, *Wisdom, Authority and Grammar*.

to blows over such pressing questions as whether the Latin pronoun *ego* [I] can have the vocative case, and one is credited with having composed the improbably titled 'In Praise of the Undead' ('laudibus indefunctorum'). This spurious work Virgilius introduced as an example of the rhetorical trick he called 'scinderatio fonorum' [the scrambling of sounds], a kind of encryption. Its most extreme form, 'scrambling of letters', he frankly admitted to be 'pointless' [superflua], yet as nonetheless also elegantly used by the author Emilius (similarly fictitious), to say 'SSSSSSSSSSS PP NNNNNNNN GGGG RR MM TTT D CC AAAAAAA IIIII VVVVVVVV O AE EEEEEEE' resolved as meaning 'sapiens sapientiae sanguinem sugens sanguissuga uenarum recte uocandus est' [the sage who sucks the sap of sagacity can rightly be called the bloodsucker of veins].[36] If Virgilius was truly a product of seventh-century Ireland, his eccentric brilliance – nurtured, so he claimed, by his teacher Aeneas, who called him Maro, 'because in him the spirit of the ancient Maro lives again'[37] – shows a learned culture that was ambitious to emulate the classical era, and did not feel obliged to be functional or overtly religious. One can imagine that to sit at the feet of a teacher like Virgilius would have been exhilarating indeed for those crossing the sea in search of wisdom.

We should conclude our glimpse of seventh-century Ireland with one further group of texts which, like Virgilius, joyously evades pigeonholing. The *Hisperica famina* [*Hisperic Utterances*], named from a rubric in one manuscript, are a sequence of quasi-poetic texts, transmitted in parallel versions, each in a single manuscript. They appear superficially to be classroom compositions on set topics: 'On the sky', 'On the sea', 'On prayer' and the like, including a dialogue between a pugnacious scholar and would-be students, and scenes from the students' daily routine.[38] What marks them out is that they discuss such ordinary matters using simple syntax, and lines of prose that adopt the shape and word-patterning of verse, but affect a bizarre parade of obscure words, often rare or otherwise unattested, constructed from bits of both Latin and Greek, even Hebrew, some defying interpretation. A range of poetic, grammatical and other sources underpins the often riddling discourse. The students describe a simple bread-and-butter repast thus: 'Farriosas sennosis motibus corrosimus crustellas / quibus lita scottigeni pululauit conditura olei' [With dentous movements we ground grainous

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36 Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, *Epitomi ed epistole*, pp. 130–1 (x.1).
37 *Ibid.*, pp. 168–9 (xv.8).
38 Four of the *Famina* (A, B, C and D) were printed by Jenkinson (ed.), *Hisperica famina*; see also Herren (ed. and trans.), *Hisperica famina*.

crustlets / on which a spread conserve of Scottic oil pullulated].[39] The setting is evidently Ireland and it is tempting to see in the itinerant students' lifestyle a reflection of the experience of the swarms of Anglo-Saxons Aldhelm described: perhaps these are even compositions by those very students, struggling to express themselves under the 'Ausonian shackle' of Latin. As for the intention behind the *Famina*, it is hard to take them seriously as classroom essays; rather, they seem to be parodies, though not aimed at trivializing learning. On the contrary, these fascinating linguistic outings, teasingly obscurantist, experimental even, are, as Andy Orchard has shown, firmly rooted in a wider tradition of wisdom literature.[40]

This early blossoming of Latinate scholarship in Ireland is, even at the most conservative estimate, remarkable and characterfully inventive, but tailed off gradually with the similarly prompt rise of literature in the vernacular there, which went on to be far more productive. Irish scholars also took their brilliance and intellectual curiosity abroad, since in the wake of the two Columbas mentioned above, many travelled both to Britain and beyond. These men made their mark as teachers, poets and thinkers, and included John Scottus Eriugena (d. *c.* 877), the most outstanding philosopher of the early Middle Ages, remarkable for having sufficient genuine familiarity with Greek to make his own translations of key philosophical texts.[41] Ireland's influence was crucial for the Anglo-Saxons, who were somewhat behind their neighbours in beginning to compose in Latin: from the earliest period of the conversion we have no surviving Latin literature, and our first evidence belongs to the later seventh century.

Theodore and Hadrian at Canterbury

The Anglo-Saxon Church had its first native bishops from the mid-seventh century onwards, the first generation who had gained sufficient training to hold office, but an unexpected turn of events brought an outsider into the role of archbishop of Canterbury in 668. A home-grown archbishop-elect, Wigheard, caught the plague while visiting Rome in 667 to collect his badge of office, the pallium, from Pope Vitalian, and the sudden vacancy had urgently to be filled. The man eventually chosen, Theodore, a monk of Greek origin, turned out to be extremely important for the formation of

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39 Herren (ed. and trans.), *Hisperica famina*, lines 298–9, pp. 86–7 (translation modified here).
40 Orchard, '*Hisperica famina*'.
41 See Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena*.

the English Church, and his gifts as a scholar meant that he was a significant catalyst for learned culture too.[42] Theodore had as his co-worker Hadrian, abbot of a monastery near Naples (but originally from Greek-speaking North Africa), who had himself refused the pope's commission to serve as archbishop, and instead went to Canterbury to preside over the monastery of Sts Peter and Paul (later to become St Augustine's). Together, these deeply learned men established a school at Canterbury, which, as Bede later recorded (*HE*, IV.2), was an intellectual powerhouse, producing pupils destined for ecclesiastical high office. Bede marvelled that these students knew both Latin and Greek as well as their native tongue. It was a rare moment indeed, at this early period, when England enjoyed such direct access to the Greek language and its Christian literature. The East never failed to be an object of fascination, and Greek had a powerful attraction which persisted at all periods, even when largely out of reach.

Insight into what was taught at the Canterbury school comes from three key sources.[43] The one pupil we know of whose writings survive, Aldhelm, testifies to the more advanced curriculum. In a letter, he describes his studies at Canterbury, mentioning metrical poetry, computus, astronomy and law.[44] We also have sets of collected glosses (words or phrases originating as inter-linear or marginal glosses to a text, which have been plucked from that text along with the word they were meant to explain), preserved in more than twenty manuscripts.[45] This material permits a reconstruction of the works being glossed: monastic set texts, such as John Cassian's *Institutes* and the Benedictine Rule, early hagiographies, historical texts (including Gildas), grammars and various books of the Bible. These glosses' origins at the Canterbury school are suggested by the fact that occasionally an explanation is marked 'Theodore said so', or 'Hadrian says this'. The biblical glosses in particular seem to report viva voce scriptural exposition, and conduct us right into a classroom where both men brought the weight of learning from the writings of the Greek fathers, as well as personal insights, to explain unfamiliar objects and places in the Bible ('I've seen them . . .', 'We have these in Africa').[46]

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42 Lapidge (ed.), *Archbishop Theodore*.
43 Lapidge, 'School of Theodore and Hadrian'.
44 Aldhelm, Letter 1, in *Opera*, pp. 476–8 (trans. *Prose Works*, pp. 152–3).
45 Lapidge, 'School of Theodore and Hadrian', pp. 150–8; also Pheifer, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Glossaries'.
46 For the glosses, see Bischoff and Lapidge (eds.), *Biblical Commentaries*, pp. 298–423.

Beyond this second-hand record of their teaching, but little survives that was demonstrably written by these two scholars. From Hadrian we have nothing, but from Theodore a small yet illuminating harvest: a brief letter-poem, a Latin translation of Greek hagiography, and an unusual work known as the *Laterculus Malalianus*.[47] The first two of these belong to genres which continued to be important for Anglo-Latin authors. Although we have seen that metre was part of the Canterbury curriculum, Theodore's poem, addressed to Bishop Haeddi of Winchester, is in rhythmical octosyllables, a medium which at least one of Theodore's pupils, Aldhelm, took up enthusiastically. Hagiography, whether newly composed or translated in one way or another (from verse to prose, or vice versa), constitutes an extraordinarily large proportion of the literature, both Latin and vernacular, from Britain and Ireland, thanks to the central role played by the cult of the saints throughout the early medieval period, and here it is right at the start.

Aldhelm of Malmesbury

'None born of the offspring of our race and nourished in the cradles of a Germanic people has toiled so mightily in a pursuit of this sort before our humble self.'[48] So wrote Aldhelm in concluding his composite treatise on Latin metrics, known as the *Letter to Acircius*. He went on to compare himself to Virgil, who referred to 'no forerunners' tracks' in the *Georgics* (III.292–3). Aldhelm could survey his work with justifiable pride, since he was indeed the first of his race to write on this subject, and the first, as far as we know, to compose Latin verse or to write Latin prose at length. Both of these he did prolifically and exuberantly, and has left us a fascinating range of works, which were to be extraordinarily influential, in his own day and long afterwards. Much has been done to reconstruct Aldhelm's career, which there is no need to rehearse in detail here: the salient points are that he became the abbot of Malmesbury, probably not long before 680, after a spell studying at Canterbury, and was made bishop of Sherborne from 705 until his death in 709 or 710.[49] As we have already seen, his intellectual formation included, alongside the Mediterranean orientation

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47 J. Stevenson, *'Laterculus Malalianus'*. On the letter-poem, see Lapidge, 'School of Theodore and Hadrian', pp. 142–3; and on the Life of St Anastasius, Franklin (ed.), *Latin Dossier*.

48 Aldhelm, *Epistola ad Acircium*, chap. CXLII, in *Opera*, p. 202 (trans. *Prose Works*, p. 45).

49 See Aldhelm, *Prose Works*, pp. 5–10; and, with significant reassessment of dates and other details, Lapidge, 'Career of Aldhelm'.

of Theodore and Hadrian, also Irish influence, perhaps from time spent on Iona. The fact that the Acircius to whom his metrical treatise is addressed is believed to be Aldfrith, king of Northumbria (r. 686–705), is expressive of the span of Aldhelm's network: writing from Wiltshire, he directs know-ledge acquired while studying at Canterbury, with Greek speakers from Rome, to Aldfrith, the son of an Irishwoman, a scholar-king who acquired his own learning on Iona.

How is this mixture reflected in Aldhelm's writings? Beginning with his verse, we have Aldhelm's own testimony that this discipline was central to his studies at Canterbury. In the letter already mentioned, addressed to Leuthere, bishop of the West Saxons, describing the school's curriculum, he observes 'the more the inextricable obscurity of this subject [metre] is put forward to studious readers, the smaller the number of scholars becomes'.[50] His own attempt at a handbook on versification, in the form of two sections of the *Letter to Acircius*, entitled *De metris* and *De pedum regulis*, is a mixed bag, conveying something of that 'inextricable obscurity'. *De metris* is largely a dialogue between master and pupil (a format inherited from Aldhelm's principal source, a work by Audax), and is marred by the over-excited provision of irrelevant and unhelpful information. Indicative of Aldhelm's own method of learning is the pupil's repeated insistence that the master show him actual verse: 'I would learn better from examples than unsupported eloquence.'[51] Similarly in dialogue form, with sometimes comical results (the pupil exclaims, 'Now I breathlessly await to hear the list of examples of the pyrrhic foot!'[52]), is *De pedum regulis*, which is both more original to Aldhelm, and more pragmatic, since it provides the building-blocks for would-be poets, in the form of word lists, ordered according to the position in a hexameter where the words could be deployed.[53]

De pedum regulis bespeaks a rather stilted approach to poetic composition, and Aldhelm's own verses, totalling hundreds of hexameters, are, measured by classical standards, indeed a little stilted.[54] To say so, however, seems ungracious considering Aldhelm's remarkable achievement, constructed on the basis of the resources available, both the teaching at Canterbury and also attentive reading and memorization of a wide range of earlier verse, pagan

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50 Aldhelm, Letter 1, in *Opera*, p. 477 (trans. *Prose Works*, p. 152).
51 Aldhelm, *Epistola ad Acircium*, in *Opera*, p. 92 (trans. *Poetic Works*, p. 207).
52 Aldhelm, *De pedum regulis*, in *Opera*, p. 152 (trans. *Poetic Works*, p. 213).
53 See Wright's assessment of this, and *De metris*, in Aldhelm, *Poetic Works*, p. 188.
54 For analysis of Aldhelm's technique, see Orchard, *Poetic Art of Aldhelm*; pp. 86–91 discuss monotony in Aldhelm's metrical poetry.

classical and Christian.[55] It is likely that he was tuned into a Germanic poetic tradition too: in the twelfth century, William of Malmesbury told the story of Aldhelm weaving Old English verse to entice his flock into church.[56] Hence it could be that the marked alliteration of his Latin verse betrays a vernacular poet's ear.[57] A fascinating but probably unanswerable question is whether any surviving Old English verse could be Aldhelm's.[58] There is no reason why literary activity in England had to be polarized between those who wrote in the vernacular and the Anglo-Latin authors: they could easily have been one and the same, as was more obviously the case in the tenth century.[59]

The content of Aldhelm's surviving poetry is also wide-ranging. His metrical treatise incorporates, between the two blocks of theoretical prose, one hundred of his own poems, the *Enigmata*, probably his earliest hexameters, to which we shall return. On a more epic scale is his *Carmen de uirginitate*, which professes to versify his earlier prose treatise on virginity, but actually offers a distinct and complementary account.[60] Common to both halves of the diptych is a catalogue of exemplary male and female virgins, but whereas the prose expounds the theory of virginity and the threats posed to it by caring for the outward body not the inner spiritual life, the *Carmen* turns sin's menace into something very physical by presenting a bloody battle between the vices and warlike virginity, leading martial troops of virtues.

The 'twinned' work, building with poetic roof-tiles upon prose's walls, as Aldhelm put it, was a genre that the Anglo-Saxons did not invent, but they certainly took it up eagerly, perhaps appreciating the chance to demonstrate literary dexterity.[61] How the relationship between the two registers was perceived is of interest. That their prose could at times display a notably poetic flavour, through its diction, word placement or alliteration and other adornments, suggests an attraction to the elevated tone thus attained. But we cannot tell whether such authors were fully attuned to the difference between poetic and prose diction.[62] Aldhelm enigmatically states that he will be striving in vain over his *Carmen de*

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55 *Ibid*., chap. 4 assesses Aldhelm's remembered reading.
56 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta pontificum Anglorum*, v.191, pp. 506–7.
57 See Lapidge, 'Aldhelm's Latin Poetry'.
58 A notion explored by Remley, in 'Aldhelm as Old English Poet'.
59 For the evidence of Bede's use of Old English, see Chapters 1 and 10 in this volume.
60 Aldhelm, *Opera*, pp. 350–470 (trans. *Poetic Works*, pp. 102–67).
61 For two distinct takes on the genre, see Godman, 'Anglo-Latin *Opus geminatum*'; and Wieland, '*Geminus stilus*'.
62 See the analysis of several authors, including Aldhelm and Bede, by Lapidge, 'Poeticism'.

uirginitate if the prose version has not won approval, especially since verse and prose differ 'as much as sweet new wine differs from intoxicating mead'.[63] Which is better? Give me Beaujolais Nouveau every time, but what did Aldhelm mean?

We can add to the *Enigmata* and the *Carmen de uirginitate* the sequence of poems already mentioned, Aldhelm's *Carmina ecclesiastica*. Andy Orchard has shown how effectively Aldhelm deployed 'remembered reading' of earlier verse in his own work. In all of his poetic compositions, Aldhelm also had generic models: introducing his own *Enigmata* he mentions the poet Symphosius and his 'obscure presentation of enigmas'.[64] Symphosius' one hundred three-line riddle poems are transmitted in some of the same manuscripts as those of his Anglo-Latin imitators, and it is instructive to see Aldhelm taking the idea of simple poetic wordplay puzzles and crafting it into a vehicle for reflection on a great variety of themes. As for the *Carmen de uirginitate*, the section on the battle between the vices and the virtues in particular is clearly inspired by *Psychomachia* [*Battle for Man's Soul*], the epic poem by the fourth-century Christian poet Prudentius. And as we have seen, the *Carmina ecclesiastica* were influenced by the dedicatory poems which Aldhelm saw at Rome. The point of noting Aldhelm's sources of inspiration is not so much to show his lack of originality as to highlight the intelligence with which he learnt from the materials to hand, emphatically knitting himself into inherited traditions, while also making them his own.

This is true also of Aldhelm's other poetic composition, his *Carmen rhythmicum*. As the name suggests, it is rhythmical rather than quantitative verse, technically defined as continuous octosyllables: eight-syllable lines, with a stress on the antepenultimate syllable but no rules about syllable value. We have already encountered octosyllables in the Irish hymns discussed above and in Theodore's letter-poem (which does, however, use a different stress pattern from the hymns). Combining both traditions, Aldhelm took a poetic form familiar to him from the hymns, used the epistolary genre he had perhaps learnt from Theodore, and turned octosyllables into a new medium for writing a brisk mini-epic, which describes for a friend a journey he made through storm-tossed Cornwall and Devon.[65] The

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63 Aldhelm, *De uirginitate*, chapter LX, in *Opera*, p. 321 (trans. *Prose Works*, p. 131).
64 Aldhelm, *Epistola ad Acircium*, chap. 6, in *Opera*, pp. 75–6 (not included in the translation in *Prose Works*).
65 On Aldhelm's octosyllabic verses, see Orchard, *Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, chap. 2.

poem exploits all the aural possibilities of alliteration and the paciness engendered by the rhythm:

> Tigna tota cum trabibus
> Tremibunda ingentibus
> Vacillabant ab omnibus
> Aulae pulsata partibus.
> His tantis tempestatibus
> Ac terrorum turbinibus
> Nostra pavent precordia . . .

[Then the entire wooden structure with its mighty beam shuddered and tottered, shaken in every corner of the church. Amidst these mighty gales and tempests of terror our hearts trembled . . .][66]

Aldhelm's prose style has attracted more adverse comment than approbation. In full spate, it is ornately many-layered, restating the same ideas in different words and thus reaching for ever more unusual diction, wrapping pairs of nouns and matching adjectives around one another. To the modern eye, it seems to consist of tangled page-long sentences, requiring one to track back and forth in the quest for subject–verb–object, often to say relatively little. Partly this is a matter of taste, just as a church full of baroquely plump golden cherubs is not everybody's preference; it should be noted that Aldhelm's long sentences do have a clear structure, whose articulation is carefully signposted by the use of parallelism, rhyme and alliteration. It is not just the syntax, though, that requires effort: the thinking is involuted as well. Perhaps, then, it is no surprise that Aldhelm refers to himself in his prose *De uirginitate* as one who, so it is said, has a natural curiosity for the things that lie hidden when he reads what others have written.[67]

Aldhelm was well aware of his garrulous verbosity, as he called it, and one suspects that he saw it as exercise for both author and reader. The prose *De uirginitate* is dedicated to a group of nuns, and he praises his addressees for their learning, in two colossal sentences likening their exertions to those of male athletes, and then of bees, before finally describing the nuns' own labours. It is instructive for our understanding of women's education that he assumes they can follow his prose, and the very passage in which, in five parallel clauses, he lists the topics the nuns study, puts his readers through

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66 Aldhelm, *Carmen rhythmicum*, in *Opera*, p. 527 (trans. *Poetic Works*, pp. 178–9).
67 'Naturali quadam, ut mihi insitam fertur, latentium rerum curiositate' (Aldhelm, *De uirginitate*, chap. II, in *Opera*, p. 229).

their paces.[68] Each parallel clause is clearly delineated by starting with the same word, 'nunc' [now], and ending with a verbal noun ('studying', 'investigating' and so on), and articulated internally by rhymed parallel clauses, but along the way a full panoply of interlaced noun–adjective pairs, polysyllabic vocabulary and riddling allusion means that it is not a list one can dash through. Typical is the kenning-like way in which we are told that the nuns read the Pentateuch, which Aldhelm calls 'the secrets of the ancient laws miraculously put together by him who is said to have cruelly smitten the Memphitic realms with twice-five very savage afflictions of plagues, to have parted on both sides in the likeness of a wall the swelling waters of the ruddy ocean by the touch of a holy rod, recently transformed from a serpent, and to have put to flight the unbelieving crowd with horned looks, after a heavenly conversation'. By whom? Moses, of course!

This florid circumlocution is entirely characteristic of Aldhelm; many features of it are not peculiar to him, nor is the oblique line of thought, but the combination, an invigorating mental workout, was doubtless intended to leave the reader in awe of the writer's skill. Aldhelm's extensive familiarity with poetry contributed to his prose's texture. Scholars used to refer to Aldhelm's prose style as 'hisperic', that is, pointing it towards Ireland. We have seen already that one part of Aldhelm's intellectual formation may have been a period studying on Iona. Astute readers will note that this account of his prose mirrors our earlier description of Adomnán's style; similar features crop up also in the writings of Columbanus and tracking further backwards, in Gildas' invective. There are points of comparison in the impulse to inflation, but in contrast to the others, on the whole Aldhelm achieves his fullness with greater structural clarity. And hasty conclusions about a distinctively Insular style are unwise: Michael Winterbottom analysed Aldhelm's prose alongside specimens from a great variety of Insular and continental sources to show not only that there was a widespread tendency towards inflated pomposity but that Aldhelm's brand of it has closer affinities with the continent than with Britain or Ireland.[69]

Aldhelm's writings proved extraordinarily influential, not, perhaps, so much for their content, as for their form. Evidence for the immediate popularity of his works is the many imitators they quickly found: those who composed their own verse *enigmata* or continuous octosyllables, those who wrote letters littered with Aldhelmian phrases, or refried his hexameters. A member

68 *Ibid.*, chap. IV, in *Opera*, p. 232 (trans. *Prose Works*, p. 62).
69 Winterbottom, 'Aldhelm's Prose Style'.

of the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon mission to Germany, Lul, wrote a letter to his acquaintance, Dealwine, asking to be sent anything written by Aldhelm, whether prose or quantitative or rhythmical verse, as a consolation for being far from home.[70] For the most part this influence seems to be posthumous: in fact, though Aldhelm cannot have been the only Anglo-Saxon in seventh-century southern England who wrote in Latin, we have surprisingly little evidence for the work of his direct contemporaries there. He addresses letters to two pupils, Heahfrith and Wihtfrith, but if they composed anything, it has not survived. All we have is four poems from one of his other pupils, Æthilwald, using octosyllables mimicking Aldhelm's *Carmen rhythmicum*.[71] There also survives one letter which Æthilwald addressed to Aldhelm, in which he alludes to these poems, as also to his and Aldhelm's colleague Wihtfrith, leading to the assumption that they were all at Malmesbury.[72]

One other surviving work may date from this early period and context, namely an anonymously transmitted prose text known as the *Liber monstrorum*.[73] It catalogues a variety of monstrous and not-so-monstrous beings (such as Antipodeans, Ethiopians, men who like to do housework), drawing on sources which overlap with those known to Aldhelm sufficiently for scholars to conjecture that its author was working in the same milieu. Whoever he was, that author adopts a noteworthy stance with regard to the literary sources from which he derives his various monstrosities, inclining to label information from pagan sources as 'supposedly' or 'so they feign', to distinguish them from Christian sources, inherently trustworthy.[74]

The influence of Aldhelm's writing was no short-lived phenomenon: a number of tenth- and eleventh-century manuscripts of his works survive, from the period when literary texts were reintroduced into England after the drastic losses incurred during the Viking attacks from the late eighth century to the end of the ninth. These manuscripts show by the extent to which they have been glossed, both in Latin and also plentifully in Old English, that certain of Aldhelm's works were a valued part of the curriculum.[75] Further evidence of his style's influence is seen, for example, in surviving tenth-century charters which use 'Aldhelmian' vocabulary, as well as poets continuing to echo his verses.

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70 Boniface *et al.*, *S. Bonifatii et Lullii epistolae*, p. 144.
71 Aldhelm, *Opera*, pp. 528–37.
72 *Ibid*., pp. 495–7 (trans. *Prose Works*, pp. 164–6).
73 A. Orchard (ed. and trans.), *Liber monstrorum*.
74 Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 90–2.
75 See, e.g., Gwara, 'Record of Anglo-Saxon Pedagogy'.

At this point, though logic might dictate that we should turn to other writers active after Aldhelm in the south, we shall first look northwards.

The Venerable Bede (673–735)

If Aldhelm was the first English 'man of letters', then Bede, his slightly younger contemporary, may fitly be described as the last of the Fathers; later generations certainly regarded him as belonging to the patristic era. Gian Biagio Conte, concluding his massive survey of Latin literature, rated Bede as 'one of the most remarkable figures in the literary history of the early Middle Ages', placing him with the key sixth-century writers Boethius, Cassiodorus and Isidore in passing on to the Middle Ages ideas and information that formed every intellectual's 'cultural baggage'.[76] But Bede was more than a mere conduit.

Although in style his writings reveal no sign of Aldhelm's influence, Bede was well aware of his brilliant compatriot, and knew at least some of his works, to judge from an approving account in his *Ecclesiastical History* (v.18). He also refers there to Aldhelm's 'polished style' ('sermone nitido'). The two have sometimes been presented as opposite in their prose style, contorted verbosity versus pellucid clarity, but that is only a fairly superficial judgement, as we shall see. There is not the space in this chapter to enumerate all Bede's works, and there are already in print good, accessible introductions to all aspects of his achievement.[77] In his own brief autobiography, placed at the end of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede prioritized his biblical commentaries, which are very many, and some of them lastingly popular, as were his other aids to scriptural study; this, the core of his contribution, has been comparatively neglected by modern scholarship but is gaining increasing attention. Bede built firmly on the tradition he had inherited in the books he found at Jarrow: he followed in his predecessors' tracks, synthesized their teaching for a new audience, sometimes making his debt very plain, in the form of marginal reference marks distinguishing his key patristic sources. The corpus of Bede's biblical commentaries is rich and varied in texture and approach, and thus difficult to characterize in general terms. The tradition of biblical exegesis which Bede inherited envisaged four ways of unfolding the Scriptures: historical (literal), allegorical (typological), tropological (moral) and anagogical, and

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76 Conte, *Latin Literature*, p. 725.
77 DeGregorio (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Bede*; and G. H. Brown, *Companion to Bede*. See also the complete list of his works in Lapidge *et al.* (eds.), *Compendium auctorum Latinorum*, II.2, pp. 173–9.

he used them all, in varying proportions. Allegorical exposition in particular can seem fanciful to us now, but this powerful way of reading texts required lively imagination and a deeply intertextual familiarity with the Scriptures far beyond modern reach.

Alongside the commentaries, we also have Bede's homilies, intended for his fellow monks at Jarrow. Familiar with the sermons of earlier eras, his own preaching was a highly distilled version of his exegesis, in often knottily condensed and challenging Latin. Bede's prose, generally characterized with such terms as 'limpid', has, upon closer scrutiny, a varied quality, determined to some extent by the nature of the work at hand, but also, it would appear, chameleon-like, under the influence of relevant models.[78]

Bede's commentaries and homilies maintained their authority throughout the Middle Ages, surviving in many copies. This applies to his didactic works too, particularly his second treatise on time-reckoning, *De temporum ratione*, which became the standard textbook on the subject.[79] We are fortunate to have for comparison his earlier attempt to write on time-reckoning, *De temporibus*, which along with his *De natura rerum* shows a relatively undeveloped phase in Bede's intellectual progression. Then, moving away from science to more literary concerns, there are his handbooks on metre and on rhetorical figures, *De arte metrica* and *De schematibus et tropis*, and a guide to spelling and morphology, for use in the scriptorium, *De orthographia* [*On Spelling*].[80] This last is a mine of useful lore and a fascinating insight into Bede's squirrelling mind, with snippets of information gleaned from his reading in all branches of scholarship. None of these works was composed from scratch in so far as everywhere we can see evidence of the earlier works on which Bede drew, even though in each case he made a distinctive contribution to the genre.

Bede's historical writing and his prose hagiography will be considered elsewhere in this volume, as will the other saints' Lives composed at this period in England, but it is important to include here his relatively overlooked poetic compositions. In his own autobiography in the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede mentioned two verse collections, a 'liber epigrammatum heroico metro siue elegiaco' (that is, in hexameters or elegiac couplets) and a 'liber

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78 Two recent assessments are Sharpe, 'Varieties of Bede's Prose'; and Shanzer, 'Bede's Style'.

79 Bede, *Reckoning of Time*, trans. Wallis.

80 The first two of these works can be read in Bede, *Libri II De arte metrica et De schematibus et tropis / The Art of Poetry and Rhetoric*, the third only in the Latin, *Opera didascalica*, pp. 1–57.

hymnorum' (*HE*, v.24, pp. 570–1). The content of the first seems mostly to have been lost, but we may guess that it included verse inscriptions (so-called 'tituli'), like those by Aldhelm, commemorating the dedication of churches or altars (just one of Bede's seems to survive), but also perhaps the poems with which Bede prefaced some of his prose works. The 'liber hymnorum' likewise does not survive as such, but Bede's hymns are scattered across later hymnals and poetic anthologies, and were composed for specific feasts in the Church's calendar, evidently to fill out the provision inherited from hymnals imported into England in the sixth century. Bede's surviving hymns were printed in the same volume as his homilies, and it is instructive to read the two genres in parallel, since both were probably used in the setting of the Divine Office.[81] They handle similar themes, treated, in the case of the hymns, with the utmost simplicity of diction and a concisely allusive tone which suggests that Bede envisaged them as aids to meditation on familiar narratives.

This approach to verse as a distillation is observable also in Bede's greatest poem, the metrical *Life of St Cuthbert*, 979 hexameters based on the narrative of the earlier anonymous prose Life, composed, as mentioned earlier, on Lindisfarne.[82] Bede's relationship to that source contrasts with Aldhelm's earlier 'twinned work' on virginity, where the narratives of exemplary virgins in the poetic version can stand in their own right without necessary reference back to the prose and are often more accessible to the reader than the tangled prose. Bede's hagiographical poem is more subtly allusive, often seeming to assume familiarity with the stories it relates, inviting rumination upon their spiritual meaning.[83] It also shows him at the height of his powers as an accomplished Latin author, in complete control of the technical aspects of metre, gracefully but never slavishly re-using the diction of earlier poets whose verse he will undoubtedly have learnt by heart. Again the poem contrasts with Aldhelm's often ponderous and repetitive verses. We are fortunate to possess, in just one manuscript now in Besançon, what is thought to be an earlier version of the metrical *Life of St Cuthbert*, which reveals Bede's meticulous attention to improving his work, ironing out metrical infelicities, further refashioning borrowed poetic diction.[84]

This rare chance to observe compositional process is just one example of the way that Bede can be seen, over the course of his career, growing and developing, concerned to improve on his earlier work. Another case is that of

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81 Bede, *Opera homiletica, Opera rhythmica*.
82 Bede, *Metrische Vita sancti Cuthberti*; see also Lapidge, 'Bede's Metrical Vita S. Cuthberti'.
83 See Lapidge, *Bede the Poet*, pp. 12–15.
84 Lapidge, 'Prolegomena'.

his two texts on time-reckoning, separated by some years. Similarly illuminating is a comparison between his commentary on Acts and his so-called *Retractatio*, which goes back to the text to correct his earlier exposition in the light of further reading, but also with the benefit of much-improved access to the original Greek. A sixth-century Italian copy of Acts in Greek, which survives today in the Bodleian Library, may be the copy that reached Jarrow; perhaps largely through painstaking independent study of that text alongside the Latin, rather than necessarily with the help of any teacher, Bede applied his quick mind to learning New Testament Greek.[85] In this regard, as in so many others, Bede stands out as the pre-eminent scholar of his era and his race: Aldhelm may have been the first, but Bede must surely be reckoned the greatest Anglo-Saxon scholar.

Aldhelm's successors

Bede was no isolated figure, tucked away in a far-flung monastery. Even if a vow of stability – not to mention a prodigious workload – kept him mostly at Jarrow, he had a widespread network of contacts, which served him well not least in the collection of material for his *Ecclesiastical History*. He was also conscious of literary trends down south: of Aldhelm's works he explicitly names the 'most excellent book on virginity both in hexameter verse and in prose' (*HE*, v.18), and can also be demonstrated to have included reminiscences of the *Enigmata* in his own poetry.[86] There is further evidence, albeit uncertain, of north–south poetic connections, in the figure of Bede's own abbot, Hwætberht, appointed in 716. Bede dedicated a number of his works to this man, whom he dubbed 'Eusebius' on account of his holiness. Hwætberht gained his own education as a child-oblate at Wearmouth-Jarrow, a career thus parallel with Bede's, except that it brought elevation to high office as abbot, and presumably also therefore the toil of personnel management and administration. After Bede's death, the evidence of letters requesting copies of Bede's writings suggests a community pushed almost to the limit of its resources in coping with the growing reputation of that 'candle of the church'.[87]

Did Hwætberht ever put pen to paper? Two eleventh-century poetic anthologies, both copied at Canterbury, and now in Cambridge and

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85 Laistner, 'Latin Versions of Acts'; Lynch, 'Bede's Knowledge of Greek'.
86 The evidence is adduced by Orchard, *Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, pp. 254–7.
87 See Parkes, *Scriptorium of Wearmouth-Jarrow*, p. 15.

London, transmit sixty riddle poems under the rubric 'Incipiunt Enigmata Eusebii'. Lacking other evidence for this poet's identity, earlier scholars wondered whether it could be Bede's Eusebius, that is, Hwætberht.[88] In some technical respects these poems have similarities with Bede's poetic practice, but in their very essence they are dependent upon Aldhelm's *Enigmata*.[89] There is some overlap with Aldhelm's subject matter and theme, and re-use of his imagery and diction too. We may instructively compare an example from each poet on a similar topic. Here, first, is Aldhelm's Enigma LIV ('A double cooking-pot'):

> Credere quis poterit tantis spectacula causis
> Temperet et fatis rerum contraria fata?
> Ecce larem, laticem quoque gesto in uiscere uentris,
> Nec tamen undantes uincunt incendia limphae
> Ignibus aut atris siccantur flumina fontis,
> Foedera sed pacis sunt flammas inter et undas;
> Malleus in primo memet formabat et incus.

[Who could believe spectacles born of such great causes or moderate the destinies of things in opposition to other destinies? Look! I have fire, flood too, in my stomach's innards, yet the overflowing waters do not vanquish the conflagration, nor are the spring's streams dried up by the black blaze, but there are peace treaties between flames and waves; a hammer and anvil shaped me at the start.][90]

And now here is Eusebius' Enigma xv ('Fire and water'):

> Proelia nos gerimus cum iungimur ambo rebelles,
> Sed tamen ut multis bene prosint bella peracta;
> Non facie ad faciem conflictu belligeramur:
> Murus inest medius, ne statim corruat unus.

[When brought together we both, like rebels, wage war, yet our battles once fought out are of great benefit to many; we do not battle face to face in conflict: there is a wall in between, lest one of us fall instantly.][91]

Aldhelm uses the persona of a cooking-pot with twin compartments to enjoy the proximity of warring elements, neatly juxtaposed in the poem and even made to alliterate by the use of the two recondite words 'larem' (*lares* being

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88 An identification doubted by Lapidge and Rosier in Aldhelm, *Poetic Works*, p. 66 and notes.
89 Orchard, in *Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, pp. 242–3, 254, considers both sides of the case.
90 Glorie (ed.), *Variae collectiones aenigmatum*, p. 445 (my translation).
91 *Ibid.*, p. 225.

the Roman household deities, whose images traditionally stood by the hearth, hence by extension *lar* can refer to the hearth itself) and 'laticem' [liquid]. There are other things to appreciate about Aldhelm's treatment of the subject, for example the way he contrives to use four different words apiece to refer to fire and water (stretching to breaking-point my capacity to find sufficient credible English synonyms), and then also plays with their collocation in successive verses. Then in the last line he tosses a simple clue to the reader: I'm made of metal! Eusebius' poem seems somehow indebted to this basic vision of warring factions that are nonetheless kept apart – in his view forcibly, in Aldhelm's by mutual consent – but he cannot come anywhere near Aldhelm's almost comical sense of wonder at an elemental battle fought out in a camp-stove.

Close comparison like this tends to show Eusebius' more limited imaginative range; nevertheless his poems merit more attention than scholarship has accorded them hitherto. One might say that it is a rather particular mindset that can produce a four-line riddle on the letter *u* in which its status as both vowel and consonant and then soundless (after *q*) can be explored simply (Enigma XIX), but for which the concluding line takes another tack, utterly baffling: 'naughty Arius banishes me from the Creed' ('me malus Arrius expellit de iure fidei').[92] This line poses as giveaway final clue, like Aldhelm's closing line that we have just seen, but seems more enigmatic than the rest of the riddle.

The same two manuscripts that transmit Eusebius' *Enigmata* follow them with a further forty poems, entitled, in an unfortunate mangling of the poet's name, 'Incipiunt enigmata Tautuni'. Rightfully restored, this is Tatwine, archbishop of Canterbury (731–4), whom Bede praised as 'excellently instructed in the Scriptures' (*HE*, v.23, pp. 558–9). Bede also reports that Tatwine, before his elevation, served as priest at Breedon-on-the-Hill (Leicestershire). We know nothing of his background or education. The proximity of his *Enigmata* to those of Eusebius, both in the manuscripts and in the standard edition, has given rise to the assumption that Eusebius wrote his sixty to bring Tatwine's forty up to the hundred canonized by Aldhelm. Both poets were certainly indebted to Aldhelm's *Enigmata* but we cannot be sure exactly when either set of poems was composed, even if Eusebius could rightly be identified as Hwætberht.

Just as a comparison of Eusebius' work with Aldhelm's suggests its relatively limited imaginative range, so reading Tatwine's *Enigmata* alongside his

92 *Ibid.*, p. 229.

model shows us both a skilled poet and also a fertile mind, alive to the genre's potential. Tatwine tackled more abstract subjects than Aldhelm, and, driven by the anthropomorphism inherent in the genre as he inherited it, placed them in a sort of mythological extended family akin to that of the classical deities. So faith, hope and charity are the daughters of a wise queen who keeps to a sunlit boudoir (II), and the four ways of expounding the Scriptures are female watchers who, directed by an unnamed 'dominatrix', protect the treasure of another woman who is that mistress's sister (III). More straightforwardly, pride (XXV) is the offspring of Lucifer, caused his fall, and then, for its exclusive service, kept seven queens locked up with their wicked offspring (the other deadly sins and lesser sins, or perhaps sinners?). Yet a little boy (the infant Christ) has slain it.[93] At other times, Tatwine's *Enigmata* contrive to be both gently humorous, as when we hear an anvil wretchedly lamenting an inability to dodge its bald head sideways to evade the smith's blows (XXVIII), and also darkly sadistic, as when the embroidery needle (XIII), whose body's use pleasures kings, so it claims, describes how its beauty increases when its face is pierced (expressed by the violent verb 'iugulauerat') by a slender guest, the thread passing through its eye.[94]

Another manifestation of Tatwine's considerable learning is a grammar book transmitted in four continental manuscripts, and labelled by just one of them as *Ars Tatuini*. An unpretentious account of the parts of speech, plentifully illustrated with word lists and quotations, it is the first known *Ars grammatica* to be composed for use in England, and although clearly dependent on a range of much older works, was nevertheless praised by its modern editor, Maria De Marco, as the patient work of an alert mind seeking to adapt old, often confusing material for a new linguistic situation.[95] Tatwine's *Ars* thus parallels the treatises of Aldhelm and Bede on metrics, in looking to provide materials more suitable for an Anglo-Saxon audience than the books they had inherited.

We should briefly mention one other successor to Aldhelm who wrote not long after Tatwine, namely Felix, the otherwise unknown figure responsible for the prose *Vita* of St Guthlac of Crowland, dedicated to Ælfwald, king of the East Angles (713–49). Although it is discussed in Chapter 10 below, Felix's text is worthy of mention here for his prose style, which bears the clear imprint of Aldhelm's in its quest for polysyllabic texture and recherché vocabulary.[96]

93 Glorie (ed.), *Variae collectiones aenigmatum*, pp. 169, 170, 192.
94 *Ibid.*, pp. 195, 180.
95 Tatwine, *Ars Tatuini*, p. 141. Cf. Law, *Insular Latin Grammarians*, pp. 64–7.
96 Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*.

There is no certainty as to Felix's origins, even whether he was an Anglo-Saxon, nor yet concerning the place where he was writing. As well as Aldhelm's prose, Felix also drew upon Bede's prose Life of Cuthbert (and fleetingly upon the preface to the verse life), which means that the text must have been composed after 720.

The mission to Germany

The story of Aldhelm's *Enigmata* and their influence brings us to another key figure in the history of Anglo-Latin, and to a whole new sphere of activity, the mission-field in Germany. In one of the manuscripts that transmit the riddle poems of Tatwine and Eusebius, but also in nine others, are twenty *enigmata* on the vices and the virtues addressed by Bishop Boniface to an unnamed woman (described as his sister, but probably a sister in Christ).[97] Boniface, who began life as Wynfrith, and gained his education in Wessex, was made a bishop in 722, at the beginning of his work to spread the Gospel in Germany. Only one eleventh-century manuscript actually transmits the title referring to Boniface as bishop, and need not therefore be authoritative, that is, the *enigmata* could in theory belong to the period before Wynfrith left England, when he also composed handbooks on grammar and metre, reflecting the same scholastic concerns as his contemporaries Bede and Tatwine, and Aldhelm before them. That said, an attentive reading of Boniface's verses may suggest that he was indeed already abroad when he wrote them. In Enigma IX in the second set, 'Concerning Ignorance', the vice observes that from her stock grow sin's harmful offspring, 'and for this reason the Germanic land has always loved me'.[98] She tars the Slavs and the Scythians with the same brush in the next line, but the fact that Germany is listed first may reflect Boniface's immediate concerns.

Boniface's debt to Aldhelm's verse is everywhere evident in his *enigmata*, in borrowed diction, but he could not match the poetic imagination and skill of his predecessor.[99] Even though he cleverly contrived to have the vices and virtues describe themselves in lines which then literally speak the name of each one, because the solution is hidden in an acrostic (spelling out 'EBRIETAS DICEBAT' [Drunkenness said], and so on), nonetheless there is a woodenness in both versification and subject matter. Boniface seems too weighed down by

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97 Glorie (ed.), *Variae collectiones aenigmatum*, pp. 273–343.

98 *Ibid*., p. 338; attention was first drawn to this evidence in the earlier edition by Dümmler, *Poetae latini aevi carolini*, vol. I, pp. 1–2.

99 Glorie (ed.), *Variae collectiones aenigmatum*, pp. 273–343; see Orchard, *Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, pp. 248–9, on Boniface's debt to Aldhelm.

dry moralizing for his verses to take wing. It may be that the germ of the idea to use the riddle genre for this particular topic lay in something he had written a few years earlier, and the contrast between that and these *enigmata* highlights where Boniface's literary gifts lay: with the preacher's rhetorical prose. Sometime between 716 and 718, Wynfrith, as he still was, addressed a letter to Abbess Eadburg, recounting a monitory vision of the afterlife granted to a monk in Shropshire. Among other experiences, the dreamer sees his own vices haranguing him: 'I am your lust', or 'I am the somnolence, oppressed by which you got up late to praise God', and so on. The vociferous vices are supported by demons who, like old-fashioned bobbies, have noted down all the particulars of each sin. Later the dreamer's puny virtues pipe up, this time speaking of him in the third person, as if distancing themselves from him: 'I am the obedience he showed to his elders . . . I am the psalm he sang to make expiation to God for idle talk.'[100] The scene, indeed the whole letter, is a wonderful set-piece, manipulating the audience's darkest fears about sin, death and the afterlife far more effectively than the plodding riddle poems.

Just as Boniface's poems depend heavily on Aldhelm's verse, so also his prose is modelled to some extent on that of his predecessor. A remarkable survival from this period is a large collection of the letters sent and received over nearly a century by Boniface, his co-workers and successors in Germany. Some are businesslike, but even though letter-writing in Latin was bound by convention, from others we can gain a fascinating insight into the enthusiasms and tribulations of the eighth-century mission-field, and of those left back home.[101] Both Boniface and his successor as archbishop of Mainz, Lul, refer to their troublous exile, frequently ask for books to be sent them as a comfort, as well as seeking always to be remembered in prayer, in return for goat-hair towels and other charming souvenirs from abroad. The pleas for books convey the impression of desperate need; if things were difficult at the start, though, the ensuing steady stream of cultural export is what seems ultimately to have safeguarded some literature that was composed in England but only now survives in later copies made on the continent. Both Boniface and Lul write prose which, at its most elevated, strains after the qualities we have identified in Aldhelm's writing (and after all, we have already seen Lul asking for the latter to be sent to him), and which can at times seem somewhat second-hand and repetitive.[102]

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100 Boniface, Letter 10, in *S. Bonifatii et Lullii epistolae*, pp. 9–10.
101 The collection can be found in Boniface *et al.*, *Bonifatii et Lullii epistolae*.
102 See Orchard, 'Old Sources'.

Although emotion is always controlled by the genre's formality, Boniface's letters often make for poignant reading, especially when we recall his subsequent martyrdom while spreading the Gospel in the Netherlands. Of particular interest is his correspondence with a group of women, who were either his supporters from afar, such as Eangyth (abbess of a double monastery in southern England), or those, like Leobgyth, who joined him in Germany. Scholars have commented on the affectionate friendship these letters bespeak, but in particular, given the dearth of Latin confidently ascribed to female authors, these letters offer precious testimony to the level of education available to such women, and to their concerns and status.[103] They too seem to have studied Aldhelm and are keen imitators of his diction, both prose and poetic – it is almost as if that tone were a comforting private language shared by those in exile and reminiscent of the 'old country', as has been suggested by Andy Orchard in an insightful analysis of the formulas used in these letters, which he memorably describes as 'the authentic voice of Anglo-Saxon angst'.[104] He shows that these letter-writers depended extensively on recycled formulaic phrasing, which bounced to and fro among them, along with webs of intertextual references to the Scriptures and such other texts as were available or had been memorized.

Among this material there are some especially plangent letters (nos. 143, 147–8), addressed by an Anglo-Saxon woman named Beorhtgyth to her neglectful brother Baltheard.[105] The first letter which bears her name opens in abrupt fashion with an allusion to the Book of Job: '"My soul is weary of life" for love of you!' Beorhtgyth reminds Baltheard that he is her only relative, that, as the Song of Songs cries, 'love is stronger than death'; she pleads to see him before she dies. She concludes with a rhythmical poem, presumably her own composition (and somewhat indebted to Aldhelm's *Carmen rhythmicum* and those of his pupil Æthilwald), expressing the hope that they will be joyfully together in heaven. The next letter appears to respond to a now-lost missive from Baltheard (seemingly along the lines of 'chin-up old girl'), again begging for a reunion 'because I cannot at all stem the welling-up of tears'. Again she ends with a derivative rhythmical poem. One further letter transmitted in the same manuscript has the names stripped out (to provide a model letter) but is generally assumed to belong with the others.

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103 Fell, 'Boniface Correspondence'.

104 Orchard, 'Old Sources', p. 20.

105 Boniface *et al.*, *Bonifatii et Lullii epistolae*, pp. 282, 284–7. The ninth-century Mainz manuscript transmitting the correspondence records the names as 'Berhtgyth' and 'Balthard'.

It is pared down in other ways too, lacking explicit literary allusion or accompanying verses, the direct tone allowing a voice of isolated grief to ring out. Beorhtgyth ends with a note of deep despair: 'Now I know for certain that you do not care about little me.' Confusion begotten of deep feeling possibly contributed to some grammatical infelicities, at least as transmitted, but we should not be drawn too far into reading Beorhtgyth's lamentation as uncontrolled spontaneous utterance, considering that composition in Latin would have required some level of concentration and conscious craftsmanship.[106] It may seem rather extraordinary that a message so painfully personal has been preserved in a way that envisaged re-use like a ditty in a greetings card. Yet Beorhtgyth's expression of loneliness belongs within a wider literary tradition very much shaped, as we have already seen, by remembered reading and efficient, productive recycling of the carefully crafted phrases of those who have gone before.[107]

Every bit as intriguing as Beorhtgyth's story is a work that derives from the same German context, some years later on. Not long after Wynfrith/Boniface's departure, two brothers, Willibald and Wynnebald, also set out from Wessex, heading for Rome. Willibald alone continued eastwards, reaching the Holy Land and Constantinople, travelling widely before joining his brother who was now in Germany; there he was consecrated bishop of Eichstätt in 741. Over thirty years later Willibald recounted the story of his adventurous travels to an Anglo-Saxon nun at his brother's monastery in Heidenheim. This material she carefully incorporated, often hardly changing Willibald's own words, into a Latin hagiographical diptych, recounting the brothers' Lives, completed by 785 (before Willibald had died, in fact).[108] This nun hid her name – Hugeburc, as she spells it – in a cryptogram, but even before that was finally decoded in the oldest manuscript in the 1930s, her personality had already emerged in all its eccentricity from the pages of her text, gendered by the feminine endings of the Latin: 'I, unworthy woman ('indigna') of the Saxon race, very latest ('novissima') of those coming here . . . and in comparison with my countrymen, just a weak little woman ('homuncula')'.[109]

Hugeburc's self-image is of an 'idiota', 'corruptible in the feminine and frail weakness of my sex'; nonetheless, she dares to put pen to paper. And when she does so in her own words rather than those of Willibald, the ensuing prose is a remarkable combination of tortuously ornate Aldhelm-inspired tone and

106 Dronke, *Women Writers*, pp. 30–3; Orchard, 'Old Sources', pp. 36–8.
107 Orchard, 'Old Sources', p. 36.
108 Holder-Egger (ed.), *Supplementa*, pp. 86–117.
109 *Ibid*., p. 86; on the cryptogram, see Bischoff, 'Wer ist die Nonne?'

what seems almost a wilful disregard for the rules of Latin morphology, so that adjectives and nouns dodge across to declensions where they do not belong and verb endings intermarry. In the quest for the layered expansion we have observed in Aldhelm's prose, for variation's sake Hugeburc coins vocabulary to a far greater extent than her model, generally by adding suffixes to existing forms, to end up with words that might render English translations such as 'demention' (instead of dementia), 'infantial' (for infantile) and 'fornicatial'.[110] Occasionally this makes difficult reading, and contrasts markedly with the simple paratactic narrative of Willibald's whistle-stop travelogue, yet one cannot help enjoying Hugeburc's bravado. She concludes the twinned biographies in characteristically resonant style, whose flavour an English translation can barely convey:

> et nunc Deo gratas gero, cuius nempe imperio nutata fundantur tota etheria, terrestrea, aequorea, infernalia, ambulantes, volantes, natantes, reptantes; rite quem laudant late falanges; clara cuius miracula cottidie cunctis choruscant in cosmo; cui est honor . . . Amen.

> [and now I give gratitude to God, by whose command all tottering things are created, things heavenly, earthly, watery, hellish, walking, flying, swimming, creeping; whom rightly the hordes widely worship, whose distinguished miracles daily dazzle all in the world, to whom be honour . . . Amen.][111]

Alcuin

The Bonifatian correspondence preserves letters sent by sundry holders of high ecclesiastical office in England, for the length of the eighth century, whose epistolary style sometimes matches the ambition of their addressees, and sometimes takes a more humdrum tone. The letters testify to a continuing educational tradition, even if it would be a good few years until anyone could come near to matching Bede's range and productivity. During these years, just such a mind was being trained at a flourishing school at York, namely Alcuin. Like Boniface he was destined to leave England, never to return permanently, taking with him, in the service of Charlemagne, the great learning he had acquired there under the aegis of his much-beloved teacher Ælberht, who later became bishop at York. Unlike Bede, Alcuin and his

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110 Her Latinity was analysed by Gottschaller, *Hugeburc von Heidenheim*.
111 Holder-Egger (ed.), *Supplementa*, p. 117 (my translation).

writings still await an accessible detailed account, and this chapter's limited scope cannot do justice to their range.[112]

Alcuin followed Aldhelm, Bede and others we have mentioned here in writing to serve the needs of the classroom on spelling, grammar, rhetoric and dialectic. He wrote hagiography and biblical exegesis as Bede had done, and it is striking that after him no full-blown biblical exegesis, as opposed to homilies or translations, survives from an English pen until after the Norman Conquest. His biblical commentaries have suffered from relative neglect, thanks to the prevailing view, possibly unjust, that they are largely derivative summaries of earlier writings. Some of these works may date from the period before Alcuin went to join Charlemagne's court in 782, but he was at his most productive thereafter right up until his death in 804. His remarkable output was stimulated in part by access to a wider array of earlier texts than had been the case at York, including key works such as Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. Moreover, fresh horizons were also opened up by the network of scholars and poets surrounding Charlemagne, and by new and different circumstances, ecclesio-political events in which Alcuin was personally involved. Thus he wrote theological treatises that harked back to the patristic era in their refutation of the heretics of his day, the Adoptionists; he composed works on the liturgy and on morality, but he also went beyond Bede in touching upon philosophy, astronomy, music and mathematics. Following tradition, he produced what begins as a versification of the *Ecclesiastical History* before moving to more recent events, including the death of his beloved teacher Ælberht, namely his long poem *On the Bishops, Kings and Saints of York*.

We are also fortunate to have some 275 letters by Alcuin. Like those of Boniface, these are at once bound by the conventions of the genre, yet often convey a strong sense of personality, engaged and engaging, winsome and at times infuriating. Where they differ from Boniface's is in using a clear prose style closer to Bede than to Aldhelm. Alcuin addressed himself to kings – in particular, obviously, Charlemagne – and other laymen, to bishops, abbots, former pupils. Whether writing to this last group, or to the highest authority, Alcuin felt called to offer hard-hitting criticism and practical advice where it seemed needful, but often the frankness was framed by expressions of affection or playfulness, as if to sugar the pill.[113] So, for example, Alcuin writes to admonish his ex-pupil Dodo, swept from the teacher's matronly bosom by

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112 See Bullough, 'Alcuin (*c.* 740–804)', *ODNB*; and the entry by Lockett listing all of Alcuin's works in Lapidge *et al.* (eds.), *Compendium auctorum Latinorum*, I.2, pp. 145–53.

113 On Alcuin's epistolary identity, see Garrison, 'Aspect of Alcuin'.

fleshly desire; unsparingly he reminds him of the fire that burned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, that God and the angels look on while Dodo commits acts that he would blush to have a human onlooker see him doing, that human pleasures are dung and decay. Yet he prefaces the letter with a couplet that plays untranslatably on the name Dodo, 'Do do iuxta nomen tuum tibi, tu mihi da da' [I give, give in accordance with your name; you give give to me], and ends it with another poem, imagining that the letter's page will be Dodo's companion, conveying him, duly repentant (so Alcuin hopes), towards companionship with Christ.[114]

The long York poem mentioned above is part of a considerable body of verse that survives from Alcuin's hand, some of it belonging to the genres we have already mentioned here, namely *tituli*, the poems to mark church dedications, and hagiography, notably one half of a 'twinned work' dedicated to St Willibrord, following in the tradition already noted. The fluid nature of the division between the functions of prose and verse is also demonstrated by Alcuin's extensive use, in common with his fellow poets in the Carolingian court circle, of the poetic epistle, which he bent to a variety of situations and tones, lyrical, humorous, melancholic, admonitory and didactic. Alcuin has been described as 'the most versatile and influential of early Carolingian poets', perhaps enabled to be so because he had the benefit of a distinct tradition behind him, the body of Anglo-Latin poetry already in existence.[115] Along with his friends and colleagues, he inhabited a poetic world that was significantly different from that of Aldhelm and Bede, more overtly embracing earlier classical Latin verse, returning to neglected poets, genres and themes, all powerfully driven by Charlemagne's desire to build a new Rome.[116] It is difficult to imagine what Alcuin's predecessors would have made, for example, of the poem addressed to an errant pupil nicknamed Corydon, which toys with allusion to Virgil's second Eclogue (the bumpkin Corydon regretting the departure of his town-boy lover, Alexis). Ostensibly the poem is a complaint that the addressee has not sent greetings to mark Alcuin's return from across the sea. The poem's first line, 'En tuus Albinus, saeuis ereptus ab undis' [Lo! Your Albinus, snatched from the raging waves], makes comic allusion to the hero Aeneas' first words to Dido, 'adsum / Troius Aeneas, Libycis ereptus ab undis' (*Aeneid*, 1.595–6). Alcuin laments Corydon's wasted talent – every bit of

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114 Letter LXV, in Dümmler (ed.), *Epistolae Karolini aevi*, pp. 107–9 (trans. in Alcuin, *Life and Letters*, pp. 132–3).

115 Godman (ed. and trans.), *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, pp. 6, 9; Orchard, *Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, pp. 110–11, 241, notes the extent of Alcuin's debt to Aldhelm.

116 See Garrison, 'Emergence of Carolingian Latin Literature'.

his body had rung with poetry, from innards to hair ('Viscera tota tibi cecinerunt atque capilli') – and then playfully but firmly recalls him to his priestly duty, which has been submerged by the demon, drink, also gently chided, 'Woe upon you, father Bacchus!' ('Ve tibi, Bacche pater!').[117] Aside from this admonition, the poem also encompasses two themes that emerge from Alcuin's verse, namely poetry as the pinnacle of intellectual endeavour, the poet's very life-force, and melancholy at the world's transitoriness. The latter is the hallmark of one of Alcuin's most often quoted poems, prompted by the sack of Lindisfarne by the Vikings in 793:

> Sic fuit atque fiet secli uersatilis ordo,
> Laetitiae numquam sit cui certa fides.
> Qui iacet in lecto, quondam certabat in aruis
> Cum ceruis, quoniam fessa senectus adest.

[Thus was the order of this world subject to change and so will it be. Let no one have trust in the permanence of joy. He who lies on his bed once strove in the fields with stags, but now weary old age is here.][118]

It is tempting to see a parallel here with the sense of loss evinced in the so-called Old English elegies, such as *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, but the theme is universal, voiced already, for example, in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, whose gloomy statement 'youth and pleasure are vain' (11:10) Alcuin liked to quote.[119] He lamented that the drunken Corydon, once an accomplished poet, had fallen completely silent, and in the Lindisfarne poem too, old age silences a once fluent voice: 'Clarior ecce tuba subito uox faucibus haesit, / Auribus adpositis murmura clausa ciet' [A voice clearer than a trumpet, see, suddenly sticks in the throat, mustering muffled murmurs for nearby ears].[120] Shaken by current events, Alcuin can only have had the merest inkling of the silence that was to fall over his homeland during the century which brought his own death in 804.

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117 Carmen 32, line 24, in Godman (ed. and trans.), *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, pp. 122–3, with commentary on the poem at p. 18.
118 Carmen 9, lines 99–102, *ibid.*, pp. 130–1.
119 E.g., Letter LXV, in Dümmler (ed.), *Epistolae Karolini aevi*, p. 108 (trans. in Alcuin, *Life and Letters*, p. 133).
120 Carmen 9, lines 109–110, in Godman (ed. and trans.), *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, pp. 132–3.

Into the ninth century: continuities and disjunctures

The educational tradition at York which produced Alcuin seems to have continued in a limited way after his departure. Surviving in a single copy are the versified miracles of St Ninian of Whithorn, the *Miracula Nynie episcopi*, which appear to have been sent to Alcuin by ex-pupils at York, perhaps in the hope of correction, but also maybe with a wish to show that they were trying to keep up the tradition.[121] These verses have been branded a very mediocre effort, described by Orchard as 'a cut-and-paste pastiche' recycling the verses of Aldhelm and Bede and a selection of other schoolroom texts.[122] Orchard finds echoes of Alcuin's poetry too, but overall sees in the *Miracula* a sign of the growing disparity between the skills of the poets surrounding Charlemagne and those in the country Alcuin left behind.[123]

Slightly later is *De abbatibus*, composed by one Aediluulf and dedicated to Ecgberht, bishop of Lindisfarne (803–21). This poem commemorates the abbots of an unnamed monastic community, possibly at Crayke in North Yorkshire.[124] Aediluulf knew Aldhelm's poetry, which shaped his own lines, but he also echoes Alcuin, as well as sharing some of the latter's metrical preferences.[125] It seems probable that such resonances derive as much from the instruction Aediluulf may have received from his teacher Hyglac, possibly himself a pupil of the York school, as from direct access to Alcuin's poems.[126] After these texts, however, a deathly silence falls across the north of England, from a Latin literary point of view, and there is nothing further to mention that falls within this chapter's timeframe.

For southern England at this period we are hard pressed to find evidence of explicitly literary activity, which appears likewise to descend into a darkness foreshadowed by Alcuin's grim lines on Lindisfarne. Under ever more widespread Viking attack there seems to have been a haemorrhaging of both books and also intellectual energy. Even after the gradual recovery brought about by King Alfred (r. 871–99) once he had gained the upper hand in the struggle against the Viking armies, it would be some years before the narrative of Latin literature in England resumed, and the truth is that before the Conquest there

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121 See Lapidge, 'Aediluulf ', p. 168.
122 Orchard, *Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, pp. 260–3. The poem was edited by Strecker in *Poetae latini aevi Carolini*; see also J. and W. MacQueen (eds. and trans.), *St Nynia*, pp. 88–101.
123 Orchard, 'Wish You Were Here', pp. 27–34.
124 Æthelwulf, *De abbatibus*; see also Lapidge, 'Aediluulf '.
125 Orchard, *Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, pp. 263–4 and associated tables.
126 Lapidge, 'Aediluulf ', pp. 172–8.

were never again Anglo-Latin authors as productive and widely competent as Aldhelm, Bede or Alcuin. It is striking, though, that when intellectual life did revive, in the tenth century, it was the age of saints portrayed by Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* that inspired, and Aldhelm's texts that were studied with enthusiasm. Poetry and abstruse diction were the keynote, but of all the literary genres we have seen being explored in earlier periods, hagiography gained the ascendancy.

Royal diplomas, badly drafted and poorly written, are often cited as evidence for a dire lack of know-how at ninth-century Canterbury, which had been such a notable centre of learning in the seventh century.[127] It is possible, though, that the same body of material, namely Anglo-Saxon charters, can also afford some indication that at points further west there were pockets of survival, consonant with the fact that at the end of the ninth century Mercia was one of the places to which King Alfred could turn for scholars to assist him in rehabilitating cultural life and education in his realm. A document such as the charter (Sawyer 197) by which Beorhtwulf, king of the Mercians, made a grant to the abbot and community of Breedon-on-the-Hill (Leicestershire) in 848, shows a draftsman capable of prose reminiscent of Aldhelm's without needing necessarily to lift phrases wholesale from his work.[128]

Although we have no Latin written by the Mercians whom Alfred brought into his service, Wærferth and Plegmund, the last Latin text we must consider here was written by one of his other advisors, namely Asser, bishop of St David's in far west Wales and later bishop of Sherborne (d. 909). Asser first met Alfred in about 885, and agreed to spend half the year with the king in Wessex, leaving him supposedly free to return to Wales for the rest of the time. Before considering his work, it is worthwhile taking a moment to review what we know of Latin learning in Wales up to this point. The reality is that although hagiographical narratives produced principally in Brittany but concerning saints hailing from Wales portray schools and scholarly endeavour in the region in the sixth century, we have startlingly little Cambro-Latin that survives, and certainly nothing to compare with the voluminous efforts of Aldhelm and Bede.

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127 Lapidge, 'Latin Learning in Ninth-Century England' in his *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899*, pp. 435–6.

128 S. Kelly (ed.), *Charters of Peterborough Abbey*, no. 8 (and cf. appendix 3 for a comparably ambitious Mercian charter, Sawyer 193). For a study of Latinity in the Mercian charters, see Snook, 'Literary Dimensions of Anglo-Saxon Charters', chap. 2.

The ninth century, however, provides pockets of evidence for continuing scholarly activity in Wales, with more detail than there is room for here.[129] Such evidence comes in the form of surviving manuscripts that suggest the study and glossing of texts, the likely presence of Irish scholars in Wales, and a lively engagement with language. This last emerges from a remarkable letter preserved in a manuscript now in Bamberg, in which four Irishmen offer the solution to a cryptogram in Greek letters: 'This is the inscription which was offered as an ordeal by Dubthach to the learned Irishmen at the castle of Merfyn, king of the Britons, thinking himself the best of all the Irish and the Britons.'[130] Such games call to mind the world of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, also echoed by a spoof Welsh 'runic' alphabet with a note explaining that one 'Nemniuus' invented it to refute a Saxon scholar who had claimed that the British had no alphabet of their own.[131] The alphabets and accompanying note occur in the earliest datable manuscript from Wales, the *Liber Commonei*, written by several Welsh scribes between 817 and 835, and now forming part of the composite codex Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. F.4.32.[132]

The ruler referred to in the story of Dubthach's cryptogram is Merfyn Frych, king of Gwynedd until his death in 844. His reign seems to have been the backdrop for production of a text known as *Historia Brittonum*, the earliest form of which is thought to have been composed in 829 or 830.[133] The text was subsequently reworked and furnished with a preface naming the author as Nennius, inviting a link with the Nemniuus named in the *Liber Commonei* – possibly a deliberate attempt to endow the preface with greater antiquity than was the reality.[134] As the only attempt to record the early history of Wales, the *Historia*, a ragbag of materials, must have been seen as a precious resource and was subjected to repeated reworkings.

Few of the manuscripts written or annotated in Wales can be localized precisely, and it is, alas, impossible to say whether any of the surviving evidence might provide a context for Asser at St David's. Thus, to have some idea of his intellectual formation, we are obliged to turn to his writing. Asser was working on his *Vita Ælfredi regis Angul Saxonum* in 893 and appears to have left it unfinished. He structured the narrative on the basis of annals

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129 See Lapidge, 'Latin Learning in Dark Age Wales'.
130 Printed by Derolez, 'Dubthach's Cryptogram', pp. 368–9.
131 See Chadwick, 'Early Culture and Learning', p. 45; and Dumville, 'Nennius'.
132 Facsimile by Hunt (ed.), *St Dunstan's Classbook*.
133 Nennius, *British History; and The Welsh Annals*; see also Dumville (ed.), *Historia Brittonum*, 3.
134 On the Nennian preface, see Dumville, 'Nennius'.

from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle supplemented by information from the king himself or from personal observation.[135] As secular biography, it is a first in Insular Latin literature, and was undoubtedly modelled on the *Life of Charlemagne* written by Einhard in the early ninth century.[136] As well as his immediate model and the narrative source, Asser also drew on a variety of Latin texts, poetical, historical, hagiographical and monastic, which fill out our picture of his reading, whether that should be presumed to reflect books he used at St David's or in Wessex.[137] The thread that connects Asser with literature discussed elsewhere in this chapter is his penchant for Aldhelm's prose, evinced not only by a handful of quotations from the prose *De uirginitate* but also by the occasional contortions into which his often overlong sentences stray. Stevenson observes that Asser 'thought more of the display of his powers of composition and command of recondite words than of the matter conveyed by them'.[138] That is perhaps rather harsh; doubtless Asser wished to convey a sense of his estimation of Alfred's achievements through grandeur of tone, and if he sought to do that by recourse to the writings of his illustrious predecessor as bishop of Sherborne, he was not the first, nor yet the last, to do so.

The inhabitants of Britain and Ireland engaged in a vigorous and often highly imaginative way with the Latin language and the literary genres that they inherited. That engagement, driven by Christianity, stands out from anything that went before in areas on the fringes of the Roman Empire and from what ran parallel in its heartland (Italy and France, where in the seventh century literature entered an 'age of iron').[139] In some cases their works continued to be valued and transmitted throughout the medieval period, others never made it beyond a single copy; but they all can and should be appreciated as literature of considerable worth and interest.

135 Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ed. Stevenson; see also the edition in Asser, *Alfred the Great*, ed. Keynes and Lapidge, with an introduction on Asser, pp. 48–58.
136 Asser, *Alfred the Great*, ed. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 54–5.
137 Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 237–9.
138 Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ed. Stevenson, p. lxxxix.
139 Conte, *Latin Literature*, p. 724. See also Clackson and Horrocks, *Blackwell History of the Latin Language*, p. 298 for the observation that beyond the Empire 'nothing in earlier times had come close to the extent of the use of Latin in Ireland, Britain and Germany after their conversion to Christianity'.

Chapter 6

Bede and the northern kingdoms

S. M. ROWLEY

Brittania Oceani insula, cui quondam Albion nomen fuit, inter septentrionem et occidentem locata est, Germaniae Galliae Hispaniae, maximis Europae partibus, multo interuallo aduersa.

(*HE*, i.i, pp. 14–15)

[Britain, once called Albion, is an island of the ocean and lies to the north-west, being opposite Germany, Gaul, and Spain, which form the greater part of Europe, though at a considerable distance from them.]

The account of Britain's location with which Bede opens his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* [*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*] is conventionally read as highlighting the island's place on the edge of the known world. But Bede is also connecting and comparing here. Just after the statement quoted above, Bede locates the closest point on the continent as Gessoriacum (Boulogne), which he describes as being 'in the land of Morini' (*HE*, i.i), about fifty miles across the Channel from Rutubi Portus or Reptacæster (Richborough). The relative unfamiliarity of these place and tribal names to a twenty-first-century reader highlights the differences between Bede's map of Europe and our own.

From the perspective of salvation history, Bede has an interest in his location on the edge, because this gives Britain a special role in the fulfilment of the universal Christian mission. As writer and thinker, however, Bede also has an interest in his connections with the international Christian community. Thus, he places Britain opposite, and in direct relation to, Europe. The intellectual and textual community in which his and other early Anglo-Latin writings participate extends beyond the area Bede describes in the *Historia* and participates in what Michelle Brown calls 'the Christian *œcumen*, encompassing the Italian, Byzantine, Coptic, Frankish, English, British, Pictish and Irish components of the universal Church'.[1] Although Bede was once seen as a

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1 M. Brown, *Lindisfarne Gospels*, p. 229.

cloistered idealist, scholarly attitudes have changed; his writings are now seen not only as reflecting the local textual and cultural concerns of eighth-century Northumbria, but also as participating in this larger international dynamic.[2]

After a brief introduction and discussion of the place of Latin in early England and in understanding medieval history, this chapter examines textual production in the northern kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England from *c*. 699–821. Entry into the universal Church redrew the boundaries of the known world, altered local socio-political hierarchies and introduced new modes of literary and cultural production. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, *History of the Abbots* (after 716) and prose *Life of St Cuthbert* (*c*. 720), along with Stephen of Ripon's *Life of St Wilfrid* (before 720), the anonymous Lives of Gregory the Great (Whitby, *c*. 704–13), Ceolfrith (Jarrow, after 716) and Cuthbert (Lindisfarne, *c*. 699–705), Alcuin's *On the Bishops, Kings and Saints of York* (*c*. 782–93) and Æthelwulf's *Of the Abbots* (*c*. 803–21) can be read as reflecting and refracting the lives of prominent persons, along with the histories of the northern kingdoms. These texts combine history and biography with visions, miracles and images of sanctity, in their cultural and socio-political contexts. As they do so, they construct sanctity, social distinction and identity. They imagine the place of the Angles or English in England, as well as in relation to the continent (especially Rome) and the otherworld. They reflect how the northern kingdoms responded to the ways in which conversion to Christianity changed the shape of space and time, and the relationship between the human and the divine.

Bede, the northern kingdoms and the problem of history

Most of what we know about Bede (673–735) derives from his brief autobiography at the end of the *Ecclesiastical History*. He was born on land owned by the monastery at Wearmouth-Jarrow, where he became an oblate at age seven. He lived at the monastery, studying Scripture, observing the Rule and singing in the church. Otherwise, he states, 'semper aut discere aut docere aut scribere dulce habui' [*HE*, v.24, pp. 566–7; it has always been my delight to learn or to teach or to write]. Write he did, broadly and brilliantly. The list Bede appends to his autobiography includes forty-four works of historical, exegetical, educational, hagiographical and homiletic writing.[3] James

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2 Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 236–40.
3 *HE*, v.24, pp. 566–71. This list is incomplete: see M. Brown, 'Bede's Life in Context', p. 3.

Campbell has argued that Bede's name and the fact that he corresponded with kings suggest that he came from an aristocratic family; however, George Hardin Brown cautions that there is no documentary evidence supporting this idea.[4] Nevertheless, Bede was internationally recognized for his learning during his own lifetime. His biblical commentaries rank with those of Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose and Gregory; they earned him recognition as a Father of the Church. Bede was also deeply invested in pastoral care; he wrote passionately about the state of the Church and monasteries during his own lifetime.[5] Whether due to his family's status, the merit of his learning or both, Bede's audience included kings, abbots, abbesses and bishops. He did not hesitate, as Walter Goffart points out, to become 'a forceful advocate rectifying the past as a model for action in the present'.[6]

Beginning in the sixth century, the northern kingdoms of Deira and Bernicia occupied the area that roughly corresponds with Northumbria, though the boundaries of these kingdoms were fluid. Broadly speaking (in modern terms), the northern kingdoms encompassed the area north of the river Humber up to the Firth of Forth, with a division along the river Tyne (see Figure 1.3). The kingdoms' western limits were the Irish Sea, with the Solway Firth to the south and Ayrshire to the north.[7] Several kings, including Æthelfrith (d. 616), Edwin (r. 616–33) and Oswald (r. 634–42), united the two kingdoms into 'Northumbria'; others, such as Oswiu (r. 642–70), also temporarily extended Northumbrian rule further north or south. Northumbrian kings also founded, enriched or retired to monasteries. These became centres of power of another sort, and often remained closely associated with royal houses. Bede disapproved of such associations, especially when oversight of monasteries and land was inherited by members of an aristocratic family. Bede observes that Northumbria faced troubled times beginning with the defeat of King Ecgfrith (r. 670–85) at Nechtansmere in 685. But the reign of his half-brother Aldfrith (r. 686–705) has been praised as a time of high letters.[8] The eighth and early ninth centuries saw a combination of troubled times and periods of stability – the reign of Eadberht (r. 737/8–58) was, according to Alcuin, a happy time – until York fell to the Vikings in 866/7. After this, the centres of power and artistic production shifted southwards in Anglo-Saxon England.

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4 J. Campbell, 'Secular and Political Contexts', p. 25; G. H. Brown, *Companion to Bede*, p. 9.
5 See Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform'.
6 Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 239.
7 Rollason, *Northumbria*, pp. 6–9.
8 Colgrave (ed. and trans), *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, p. 10.

Textual production in the northern kingdoms during this period was, based on the surviving evidence, almost exclusively in Latin – the Old English versions of Cædmon's *Hymn* added to the margins of two early Northumbrian copies of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, *Bede's Death Song*, the Leiden Riddle and the inscriptions on the Franks Casket and Ruthwell Cross being the exceptions.[9] Although Latin had come to Britain as the language of colonial rule during the Roman period, it returned as the language of Christianity in the seventh century. Along with English and (temporarily) French, Latin served as one of the languages of literature, learning and law for over a thousand years. British, English and Irish readers and writers of Latin faced challenges in comparison to their continental contemporaries, because of their dramatically different linguistic background. As Rosalind Love demonstrates in Chapter 5 above, however, that does not seem to have daunted textual production.

Although Latin was an alien language, Bede, his contemporaries and heirs made it their own. They created a cultural diglossia in northern Britain, as they joined and influenced a larger textual, intellectual and spiritual community.[10] While Bede was not prone to coinages or obscure words in his prose, to note his linguistic and stylistic mastery of Latin is axiomatic, and his works circulated widely during the Middle Ages. His grammatical study of Latin, *De orthographia*, had a profound influence (via Alcuin) on the Carolingian 'Renaissance', and thereby on medieval Latin on the continent.[11] As Uppinder Mehan and David Townsend discuss, however, Bede's habit of glossing Latin place names with English ones in the *Ecclesiastical History* can be seen as an 'opening up of a space of language contestation [that] is the beginnings of a Latin that responds to English-ness'.[12] The style of the *Life of Gregory the Great* also provokes thought. Although the text's style and language have been described as 'exceptionally crude' and 'half-educated',[13] Townsend suggests that its grammar may 'open up the question' of whether the anomalous 'aspects of the text are self-conscious interventions in the conventional protocols of Latin'. After all, 'it is highly improbable that so momentous a task would have been entrusted to a linguistically incompetent member of one of England's most powerful and illustrious monastic communities'.[14] Alan

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9 For texts, see Sweet (ed.), *Second Anglo-Saxon Reader*.
10 Ziolkowski, 'History of Medieval Latin Literature', p. 507.
11 R. Wright, *Late Latin and Early Romance*, p. 103.
12 Mehan and Townsend, '"Nation" and the Gaze', p. 13.
13 Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 264.
14 Mehan and Townsend, '"Nation" and the Gaze,' p. 15.

Thacker has since shown that the text is based on written authorities, and that the author was not without learning.[15] Similarly, Æthelwulf's manipulation of poetic figures has been misunderstood, prompting Alistair Campbell to include a detailed account of the unusual poetic features of Æthelwulf's poem in his introduction to the text.[16] Æthelwulf borrowed words and images from a combination of classical and British sources, creating an intertextual poem reflecting the breadth and complexity of the textual community to which he belonged. Some of these appropriations, interventions and combinatory textual strategies correspond to the visual combinations of *romanitas* and Englishness manifest on the Ruthwell Cross and Franks Casket and in the Lindisfarne Gospels, which mix runes with the Latin alphabet, and inscriptions with visual images biblical and local (see Catherine Karkov's discussion in Chapter 3 above). The Lindisfarne Gospels include hybrid and runic display lettering (Figure 6.1).[17]

Even a preliminary glance at the ways in which writers and artists in early England engaged with, developed and influenced Latin as a literature and language suggests the possibility that a similar combination of integration, appropriation and adaptation took place in relation to their subject matter. The reception of these texts, however, has been vexed by the problem that the medieval world-view differed from our own, as did early medieval notions of history. Scholars who read and seek historical information from these texts face not only the linguistic and textual rigours of Anglo-Latin manuscripts and literary culture, but also a complex task of cultural interpretation.

Examining Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and its post-Enlightenment reception may help to bring the interpretive and ideological challenges of reading these texts into sharper focus. The *History* is the earliest and most authoritative account of the arrival of the Germanic tribes into England, their conversion and the development of the early English Church. Organized in five books, it disseminated and popularized two patterns that have been formative to the shape of Western historiography: the pattern of reading the worldly history of a people as part of their spiritual progress (i.e., as salvation history), and the practice of recording dates according to the Anno Domini system developed by Dionysius Exiguus. Book 1 describes the islands of England and Ireland, then recounts the history of Roman Britain and the advent of the Germanic tribes. The mission of Augustine of Canterbury and papal letters to him

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15 Thacker, 'Memorializing Gregory the Great'.
16 Campbell, 'Introduction' to Æthelwulf, *De abbatibus*, pp. xxxix–xliv.
17 See M. Brown, *Lindisfarne Gospels*, pp. 227–8.

6.1 St John the Evangelist, with runic letters, from the Lindisfarne Gospels (London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero D. IV), fol. 209^{v}.

dominate Book I. Book II begins with the life of Gregory the Great, then focuses on the conversion and rule of King Edwin. Book III predominantly recounts the careers and miracles of King Oswald and his missionary from Ireland, Aidan. Along with the conversion of the Mercians and Middle and East Angles, it includes the visions of Fursey. Book III also stages the arguments of Bishop Wilfrid at the Synod of Whitby, held by King Oswiu in 664. This synod resolved the problem of the differences between the Irish and Roman datings of Easter in favour of the Roman system.

Book IV begins with the appointment of Theodore of Tarsus as archbishop of Canterbury, including an account of the school he founds there with Abbot

Hadrian. According to Bede, Theodore provides a central unifying point of the English Church and a golden age of learning (see also Chapter 5 above). Book IV also includes many famous miracles: Cædmon's gift of song, Imma's loosening chains, the visions and heavenly lights of the nuns of Barking. Book IV reflects the development and success of the early English Church, including the lives of English saints such as Æthelthryth and Hild and Cuthbert. Although Book V continues Bede's account of kings, saints and abbesses, its focus turns towards heaven and salvation. Bede begins with the miracles of John of Beverley. He describes the pilgrimages of the kings Cædwalla and Ine, and the missionary activities of St Willibrord and Swithbert on the continent. Book V also includes otherworldly visions, and passages from Adomnán's *De locis sanctis*. After describing how the political fortunes of the English 'ebb and fall away' after the defeat of Ecgfrith, Bede notes that he remains uncertain about what the future will bring politically. Book V concludes with a summary of the state of England in 725, and a chronicle reiterating the key dates and events from Bede's history.

Frank Stenton exemplifies scholarly praise for Bede as a historian: 'in an age when little was attempted beyond the registration of fact, he had reached the conception of history'.[18] Because of Bede's accuracy and attention to place names, the *Ecclesiastical History* has also been used to identify the nature of archaeological sites. Problematically though, as Christopher Loveluck has shown, the written and archaeological records do not always correspond as closely as one would hope.[19] The world sometimes proves intractable to the written record from a conceptual perspective as well: the divine irrupts regularly into Bede's *History* in the form of miracles and visions. Michael Lapidge combines his praise with caution: '[so] professional is Bede's historical approach to his subject matter that a modern reader can easily neglect the fact that Bede was also a consummate storyteller'.[20]

Lapidge's treatment of Bede's 'storytelling' provides a gentle example of the way in which post-Enlightenment scholars have addressed the question of the *veritas* of certain episodes in the *History*. Although Bede's history was internationally influential throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period, by the time of Hume's *History of England* (1754–62) historians viewed miracles as monkish superstitions contrary to reason and the laws of nature. This attitude characterized Bede criticism until recently. From Charles

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18 Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 187.
19 Loveluck, 'Cædmon's World'.
20 Lapidge, 'Stoic Cosmology', p. 1.

Plummer's 1896 edition of the *Ecclesiastical History* to the work of C. W. Jones and Bertram Colgrave in the mid-twentieth century, Bede scholars have distinguished the miraculous from the historical. Colgrave writes: 'there seems to be in Bede as in most of the doctors of the Church . . . the voice of two men . . . on the subject of miracles. Perhaps we ought to recognize three men in Bede, the theologian, the hagiographer, and the historian. To some extent the three were not altogether in harmony.'[21]

The 1960s and 1970s saw increased sensitivity to Bede's cultural and theological milieu. Scholars such as Robert Hanning, Benedicta Ward, Paul Meyvaert and Roger Ray recognized that Bede (like Gildas) understood human history to be legible according to Christian beliefs, and that he patterned the *Ecclesiastical History* on the Bible, interpreting the migration of the Germanic tribes to Britain on the model of the Israelites' journey into the 'promised land'.[22] This approach has led to insightful readings of the *History*, such as Nicholas Howe's *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England*, which traces the influence of Bede's salvation history across a range of later Old English and Anglo-Latin literature. Interpreting Bede's 'storytelling' as a strategy engaging biblical and exegetical textual patterning begins to account for the unhistorical aspects of early medieval representations of sanctity, as does recognizing that the concept of history itself has changed. According to Roger Ray, 'In the Middle Ages, the word *historia* was applied to parts or all of the Bible . . . a section of the Divine Office, versified offices, statements made in court, [and] proceedings of . . . councils.'[23] History dealt with *veritas*, but in the medieval period, what could be understood as 'truth' included the plausible from a Christian perspective, because 'the Bible inculcated a vision of reality that intermingled divine and human agendas'.[24] Similarly, medieval biographies were often marvellous accounts of holy men or women, which modern scholars distinguish as hagiography.[25]

Early medieval conventions of hagiography were often derived from Evagrius' translation of the *Life of Anthony*, by Athanasius (*c*. 356–62), and Sulpicius Severus' *Life of St Martin* (*c*. 397). These play an important role in the social construction of identity – not only of the holy man as an exemplar and

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21 Colgrave, 'Bede's Miracle Stories', p. 228; See also C. W. Jones, 'Bede as Early Medieval Historian', p. 33; and Plummer, 'Introduction' to Bede, *Opera historica*, p. lxiv.
22 Hanning, *Vision of History*. See also Ward, 'Miracles and History'; Ray, 'Bede, the Exegete, as Historian'; and Meyvaert, 'Bede the Scholar'.
23 Ray, 'Historiography', p. 639.
24 *Ibid*., p. 640.
25 See Townsend, 'Hagiography'.

object of contemplation, but also of religious communities. Recognizing 'the role of memory and written narratives as powerful instruments of ideology', Catherine Cubitt demonstrates how saints' Lives 'rely in different ways on previous hagiographical lives to enhance their meaning; all show their subjects conforming to a conventionalized pattern of sanctity'.[26] However, these conventions, which include appeals to eye-witness testimony, the authorial humility topos, the suppression of individual characterization, miracles, visions, prophecies, a death narrative and posthumous miracles, raise the problem of literary 'confection'. For Cubitt, exposing these conventions causes individual saints to 'evaporate under the weight of their textual reinterpretations', revealing the 'static portrait of a holy man'.[27] In a time when – at least in the Western world – notions of individuality underpin the prevailing sense of self, the commemorative and narrative patterning of hagiography raises questions of *veritas* and tests scholarly thresholds for varieties of religious and social experience that differ from our own.[28]

The concept of the holy man and his function as exemplar have their roots in the work of Peter Brown, who turned to anthropological models to escape scholarly divisions between high and low culture, theology and popular beliefs.[29] Brown's theories respond to interpretations of the miraculous as corruption of Christianity or capitulation to vulgar imagination. This debate has been replicated (probably unintentionally) in a dispute between Ray and Goffart about Bede's conception of *veritas*. Ray suggests that Bede's use of the phrase 'vera lex historiae' [the true law of history] in his preface to the *Ecclesiastical History* 'is partly a caveat, warning the reader that his *fama vulgans* may contain factual errors'.[30] In contrast, Goffart argues that 'the *HE* spoke at the level of the *opinio vulgi*'. Bede knew he was writing fiction: 'He was thoroughly aware that . . . the truth of history could not overstep the bounds of common belief.'[31] Goffart's historiographical analysis operates on Hayden White's principle that historians write with 'the aid of some enabling and generally fictional matrix'.[32] Goffart also recognizes literary patterns, but he does so to demonstrate how the writings of Bede and others served agendas driven by competition for patronage. Goffart admits that he 'underscore[s] the

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26 Cubitt, 'Memory and Narrative', p. 64.
27 *Ibid*., pp. 50, 58.
28 P. Brown, 'Rise and Function of the Holy Man', p. 361.
29 *Ibid*., and P. Brown, 'Saint as Exemplar'.
30 Ray, 'Bede's *vera lex historiae*', p. 19.
31 Goffart, 'Bede's *uera lex historiae*', p. 116.
32 Hayden White, 'Fictions of Factual Representation', quoted in Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 17.

fictional character of most of these narratives ... to suggest that they are better suited to telling us about the authors and their audiences than to documenting [historical events]'.[33]

   This sceptical approach illuminates different aspects of the work that Bede's texts perform, and negotiates his textual strategies differently. Many scholars have focused productively on underlying social, political, didactic or reforming motives. Rather than emphasizing universal patterns, these analyses have allowed the *Ecclesiastical History* and early northern saints' Lives to be understood in the contexts of local social and political histories.[34] In some iterations, however, this focus on socio-political agendas can undermine the historicity of the texts, or reinscribe problematic divisions between high and popular culture. James Howard-Johnston points out that it may be possible, when independent information is available, to recover 'other, mundane causes' of the miraculous, thereby avoiding a stance of extreme scepticism in relation to early medieval hagiography.[35] For Howard-Johnston, the problem remains whether these hagiographical literary conventions – 'to which should be added the eye of faith, ready to construe the unusual as miraculous and credit it to the saint' – actually 'transmute the life and works of the holy person commemorated to such an extent that they inhibit the normal operations of critical literary and historical inquiry'.[36] In this phrasing, 'the eye of faith' becomes the point of contention. But 'the seeing eye is the organ of tradition', whether it be 'the eye of faith' or the eye of scepticism.[37] What are the 'normal operations of critical literary and historical inquiry', if not another set of cultural structures by which we seek to understand and analyse narrative accounts of social, historical and religious experiences? After all, White's critique of historiography addresses post-Enlightenment conventions, not medieval ones. Recognizing that Bede understood miracles as direct evidence of the active participation of the divine in his world neither obviates his historical perspicuity nor obligates us to accept his world-view; rather, it affronts our categories of common sense and logic in a way that provides a place to begin 'a heterology or science of the other'.[38]

33 Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 10, note 31, pp. 235–328.
34 See Ridyard, *Royal Saints*; Rollason, *Saints and Relics*; and Brooks, 'From British to English Christianity'; on reform, see Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform'.
35 Howard-Johnston, 'Introduction' to Howard-Johnston and Hayward (eds.), *Cult of the Saints*, p. 16.
36 *Ibid*.
37 Sahlins, *Islands of History*, pp. 144–5.
38 Sahlins, 'Discovery of the True Savage', p. 48.

The increased availability and more numerous studies of Bede's extensive *opera exegetica* in recent decades have provided both a deeper understanding of the conceptual and theological structures of Bede's world-view, and the information necessary to understand and analyse the 'symbolic dialogue' taking place 'between the received categories and perceived contexts' in his (and other early English) historical and hagiographical writings.[39] One further challenge of contextual reading is to avoid reducing a text to 'little more than a sign of the times or a straightforward expression of one larger phenomenon or another'.[40] Critical attention to context allows an analysis of the 'paradoxes and silences of the text' in relation to the larger interpretive paradigm, permitting an interrogation of, rather than a reinscription of, exegetical readings.[41] Over-emphasizing exegetical interpretation and hagiographical conventions can obscure important differences in detail, suppressing the ways in which early English texts represent history and impact the genres of history and hagiography. Given the flourishing of hagiographies of royal saints and martyrs in later Anglo-Saxon England, the bishops, hermits, missionaries and founders of monastic houses commemorated in the early northern texts present a significantly wider range of subjects.[42] For Bede, both the local and universal meanings of miracles remain crucial. Miracles in England connect the local to the universal. Although patterns of sanctity occur, each of the *vitae* and *historiae* discussed here differs from the others – even if Stephen of Ripon borrows his preface to his *Life of St Wilfrid* from the anonymous *Life of St Cuthbert*. Wilfrid never receives manna from heaven, though he helps feed the South Saxons. Cuthbert receives heavenly food; he is visited and healed by angels. Like Alban, Cuthbert causes a spring to rise out of the earth, but the circumstances surrounding these two miraculous springs differ, allowing space for individualized or localized meanings, especially in the broader contexts of each saint's life. As Roy Liuzza reminds us in his introduction to *Beowulf*, 'in the mythopoeic night, all cats are gray'; Beowulf is not Sigmund any more than Oswald is Edwin.[43] Miracles may manifest a saint's sanctity, but 'The use of conventional concepts in empirical contexts subjects the cultural meanings to practical revaluations.'[44] While the *vitae* and

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39 Sahlins, *Islands of History*, pp. 144–5. On Bede's *opera exegetica*, see DeGregorio, *Innovation and Tradition*, pp. 1–10.
40 LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, p. 14.
41 *Ibid.*, p. 88. For a fuller version of this argument, see Rowley, 'Reassessing Exegetical Interpretations'.
42 See Ridyard, *Royal Saints*.
43 Liuzza (trans.), *Beowulf*, p. 15.
44 Sahlins, *Islands of History*, p. 145.

historiae discussed here may not constitute precisely 'empirical contexts', each miracle remains an event in a particular textual context. As such, each event engages, adapts or contests the application of the conventional concept, opening a space for critical engagement not only with the construction of meaning in each text, but also with the paradoxes and silences.

The Lives of saints and abbots

The Whitby *Life of Gregory* provides a salutary launching point for a closer examination of these texts, not only because it articulates Gregory the Great's theories about miracles, but also because it presents an overview of early medieval ideals of sanctity. Although it avoids some of the conventional patterns of hagiography, the *Life* has been shown to be well grounded in the writings of Gregory and Scripture, and to play a role in early English ethnogenesis before Bede.[45] It locates England in relation to Rome and connects Gregory's sanctity with that of Edwin. By embedding the story of Edwin's conversion within the larger account of Gregory's life and virtues, the author frames Edwin within the larger spiritual community and locates Northumbria in relation to Christian eternity.

The text of the *Life of Gregory* survives in one manuscript written in St Gall, Switzerland, but the claim that Edwin's relics were brought to 'our monastery here' clinches Streonæshalch, or Whitby, as the place of composition.[46] Since Whitby was a double house, the author may have been female. The fact that the earliest life of Gregory was written in England, not Rome, is striking, because the majority of early saints' cults developed around tombs. The *vitae* tended to be composed locally to promote cults in connection with saints' relics. Other distinctive aspects of this text are the relative absence of miracles attributed to the saint and the author's discussion of the purpose of miracles. The author cautions against over-emphasizing miracles as evidence of sanctity, because, according to Gregory, 'sunt … plerique qui, etsi signa non faciunt, signa tamen facientibus dispares non sunt' [there are many people who do not perform miracles but are not unequal to those who do].[47] Using Gregory's ideas, his hagiographer points out that some of the Apostles performed miracles greater than those of Christ, and that other men

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45 See Thacker, 'Memorializing Gregory the Great'; and E. T. A. Dailey, 'Vita Gregorii and Ethnogenesis'.
46 St Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 567; Ewald, 'Die älteste Biographie Gregors I', p. 27. See also Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *Earliest Life of Gregory*, pp. 45–9, 105.
47 Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *Earliest Life of Gregory*, pp. 78–9.

performed miracles greater than theirs. Miracles are granted 'ad idola dis-truenda infidelium paganorum, vel fidelium aliquando fidem infirmam con-firmandam concessa sunt' [for the destruction of idols of unbelieving pagans, or sometimes to confirm the weak faith of believers]. Therefore, holy hermits living in isolation may not perform any miracles, while lesser men living in a city, where such signs have a role, may perform them.[48]

Patience, humility, wisdom and the healing of souls also manifest sanctity. Patience, especially, remains the greatest virtue, because 'vilior . . . vis est que stuporem semper visu et auditu solet incutere cognitum, quam quod mitem Christum et humilem simul et caritatem que ipse est habet in perpetuum' [power that can only produce amazement inspired by what is seen and heard is of a baser kind than that which avails itself of the meek and lowly Christ which Christ Himself ever has].[49] Miracles do not exist simply to create spectacles of holiness; they exist in service to the Christian mission of con-version – hence, their profusion in accounts of the conversion of England. The Whitby hagiographer draws on Gregory's writings to assure readers that boasting of miracles or requiring signs of holiness is impious. Quoting Gregory's homily on Matthew 16:14–20, she argues that patience and humility are truer, that 'miracles are greater the more spiritual they are'.[50] Gregory demonstrates his humility, rather comically, by running away from his elec-tion, but a miraculous column of light reveals his hiding place. To another holy man, this column appeared as a ladder traversed by angels, leading to Gregory's 'tabernacle' in which he shone like a lamp.[51] Revealed by (and as) this great light, Gregory assumes the papacy.

Although the theme of Gregory shedding light on ignorance remains crucial to his *Life*, the agency of this miracle belongs to the people who pray for his discovery, rather than to Gregory himself, allowing the author to emphasize both Gregory's humility and brilliance. Gregory's few miracles conform to the parameters articulated in the text. His prayers reveal the truth of transubstantiation to an unbelieving baker ('I made those loaves with my own hands', she protests), and the authenticity of cloth relics.[52] Gregory heals believers and punishes detractors, but – most often – educates and acts as an apostle. The Whitby writer imitates Gregory's didactic impulse by incorpor-ating passages from Gregory's writings, including his homilies, *Dialogues*, and

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48 *Ibid.*, pp. 78–9.
49 *Ibid.*, pp. 84–5.
50 *Ibid.*, p. 85.
51 *Ibid.*, p. 87.
52 *Ibid.*, pp. 107, 111, 153, note 83.

expositions on Ezekiel and the angels. She employs an image from Gregory's *Pastoral Care* to console anyone concerned that Gregory's miracles resemble others, explaining that 'all saints have everything in common through the love of Christ of whose body they are members'.[53] Although this has been treated as an acknowledgement that the author is fabricating, she stresses that the miracles are true of Gregory as well. Emphasis on a universal Christian experience may rest uneasily with modern audiences accustomed to an emphasis on diversity; however, this emphasis on unity corresponds to Augustine of Hippo's doctrinal assertion that there is only one meaning in Scripture.[54]

The conversion of England demonstrates Gregory's foresight and commitment to the universal mission. It provides an opportunity to present further examples of Gregory's wisdom and humility, and to connect Whitby directly to Gregory via miracles of revelation and light. The author connects her account of the Northumbrian conversion to Gregory's life by emphasizing his special knowledge about angels, as well as creating thematic echoes by repeating images of light, revelation and scourging.[55] The famous story about Gregory seeing in the marketplace some fair-haired English boys who inspire the Gregorian mission has received much scholarly attention, especially in Bede's slightly different version.[56] Although Bede apparently did not know the Whitby *Life*, he too capitalizes on the wordplay of Angli and angels. In the Whitby *Life*, the author points out that 'Angulorum' [of the Angles], is only one letter away from 'Angelorum' [of the angels]. The Whitby *Life* then puns on the king's name 'Ælli' and alleluia, then 'Deira' / de ira dei [from the wrath of god], connecting Rome with Northumbria.[57] While the author notes that Æthelberht of Kent is the first English king to convert, she moves quickly to the conversion of Ælle's son Edwin, including his exile to Rædwald's court in East Anglia at the hands of his rival, King Æthelfrith. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* corroborates these historical circumstances, and provides a more detailed account of Edwin's kingship. In an episode unique to the Whitby *Life*, the author brings the story home to Whitby, literally, by giving an account of the column of light that reveals Edwin's relics. A monk named Trimma receives three visions telling him to recover the relics from Hatfield Chase and bring them to Ælfflæd, Edwin's daughter and abbess of Whitby.

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53 *Ibid.*, pp. 131–3 (see notes).
54 Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.xxxvi, p. 40.
55 Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *Earliest Life of Gregory*, pp. 119–25.
56 *HE*, ii.1, pp. 132–5; see S. J. Harris, 'Bede and Gregory's Allusive Angles'.
57 Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *Earliest Life of Gregory*, p. 94.

After the third vision, in which he is scourged for his refusal to heed the heavenly instructions, he fulfils the task with the aid of the heavenly light. This column of light echoes that which located Gregory at the moment of his election to the papacy earlier in the narrative, and participates in the theme of illumination that runs throughout. It not only locates Hatfield Chase and Whitby in relation to Rome, but also positions Edwin's royal family in the framework of Christian eternity. These acts of commemoration, along with the engagement and repetition of literary motifs, correspond to the more general patterns of hagiography. But the envelope structure, whereby the life honours a local saint in the larger context of a universal one, sets this *vita* apart. The absence of other hagiographical conventions, such as the authorial humility topos and the death narrative, and the limited scope of the miracles distinguish it further. Focus on Gregory's role as the apostle of the English calls attention to a key historical moment, and positions England as a part of the Christian *œcumen*.

The idea that the saints' Lives were designed to attract royal patronage to a saint's cult and the monastery housing that cult in the competitive economy of the early north has gained scholarly acceptance; however, the *Life of Gregory*'s decision to subordinate its account of Edwin to that of Gregory troubles this consensus, as does its survival in a hagiographical collection copied in Switzerland. It is true that Whitby was one of at least seven religious foundations along the coast of northern Britain, including Lindisfarne and Wearmouth-Jarrow. Ian Wood identifies another major group on the lower Tyne, another grouping in the Vale of Pickering and several more geographically isolated houses.[58] The idea that several monasteries contended for limited patronage in Northumbria is not without warrant, but close reading, combined with questions about lay literacy and attention to manuscript compilation and dissemination, suggests additional motivations.

Stephen's *Life of St Wilfrid* survives in two manuscripts copied in the eleventh or twelfth century. Both manuscripts are compilations of devotional and hagiographical materials: London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian D. vi, and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Fell 3, which also contains Bede's prose *Life of St Cuthbert*.[59] The anonymous *Life of St Cuthbert* survives in seven continental manuscripts. Of the thirty-six manuscripts containing Bede's prose *Life of St Cuthbert*, about twenty-five were written in England, but several of these

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58 I. Wood, 'Monasteries and Power', pp. 15–16.
59 Colgrave, 'Introduction' to Stephen of Ripon, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, pp. xiii–xiv, and 'Introduction' to *Two Lives of St Cuthbert*, pp. 17–39.

survived on the continent. Similarly, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* survives in 166 complete manuscripts; it was disseminated by Anglo-Saxon missionaries in the eighth century, after which medieval production of copies on the continent outstripped production in England. Excerpts from the *History* also circulated in manuscripts dedicated to saints, as did hymns, supplementing the *vitae* with materials to be used in celebration of saints' days. Although any number of early English manuscripts may have been destroyed, the transmission and preservation of these texts on the continent reflect their international audience. Manuscript compilation suggests that liturgical commemoration, edification, doctrinal correctness and spiritual exemplification inform the production of these texts, and thereby helps to account for their popularity well beyond the northern kingdoms.

The *Life of St Wilfrid* combines an interest in Wilfrid's local activities with a focus on his role as an educator and traveller. Although saints are usually seen as mediators between heaven and earth, Wilfrid traverses geographical and political boundaries, bringing into focus questions about the balance of power between the Church and early English kings. The *Life* describes these conflicts in legal language, pitting the authority of Wilfrid and the pope against Northumbrian kings. Its relatively limited transmission may have had something to do with its preoccupation with land and status, despite Wilfrid's international connections. Instrumental to the development of the Church in England, Wilfrid was a charismatic proponent of Roman practices and the Benedictine Rule. He founded several churches and monasteries in Northumbria and Mercia, including Ripon, Hexham and Oundle. He served or clashed with several kings and queens, including Eanflæd, Alhfrith (sub-king of Deira), Ecgbert, Æthelthryth, Aldfrith, Osred (r. 705–16) and Æthelred of Mercia (r. 675–704). Because of Wilfrid's historical importance, his *Life* regularly features in studies of the development of the Northumbrian Church, despite some of its historical inaccuracies.

As Mark Laynesmith notes, however, the text has received limited attention as a saint's Life. Laynesmith analyses Old Testament imagery in the *Life* to demonstrate how Stephen links Wilfrid's restoration of the church at York allegorically and typologically to Herod's rebuilding of the Temple.[60] The *Life* also engages with other conventions of hagiography in its broad outlines. Stephen appropriates his preface from the anonymous *Life of St Cuthbert* and supplies Wilfrid with a portent of fire announcing his holiness at birth. But the *Life of St Wilfrid* is also distinctive. Wilfrid possesses a special ability to earn the

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60 Laynesmith, 'Stephen of Ripon'.

patronage of powerful persons. He becomes an urbane and highly social bishop, which sets him in marked contrast to Cuthbert and Gregory, both of whom desire holy isolation.

Wilfrid's social skills contribute to his rapid acquisition of land. Upon his return to the north from a journey to Rome, he befriends King Alhfrith, who grants him land at Ripon. After Wilfrid's success arguing for the Roman Easter at the Synod of Whitby, Alhfrith appoints him bishop of York. Wilfrid goes to Gaul to be consecrated, but is blown off course. He converts the South Saxons on this diversion, proving himself as a missionary. At this point, Wilfrid's fortunes begin to vary, and his story has much to do with the fact that Northumbria was divided into four episcopal sees by the 680s (York, Lindisfarne, Hexham and Abercorn). Although Chad had been consecrated as bishop of York in Wilfrid's absence, an impropriety in Chad's consecration creates space for Wilfrid upon his return. Wilfrid assumes power and restores the church in Roman style, which Stephen describes in detail. As Laynesmith demonstrates, Stephen's architectural narrative bears allegorical and typological weight. Bede, Alcuin and Æthelwulf also develop the symbolism of building and appointing churches,[61] and Wilfrid also builds churches at Ripon and Hexham. In his dedication ceremony at Ripon, he includes a formal reading of his landholdings.[62] Wilfrid performs his first miracles at this point, so that divine sanction of his holiness punctuates his construction of churches.

Initially, Wilfrid's successful relationships with Anglo-Saxon royalty led to substantial authority and landholdings. Problematically, however, the boundaries of Wilfrid's lands eventually crossed political borders; next, his religious advice to queens – theologically sound though it may have been – crossed dynastic interests. Bede reports that Wilfrid was confessor to Queen Æthelthryth, who refused to consummate her marriage to Ecgfrith. With Wilfrid's aid, she convinced Ecgfrith to allow her to retire into monastic life. She became abbess of Ely, and then an important Anglo-Saxon saint. Bede's account focuses on praising her, rather than the conflict between king and bishop (HE, IV.17–18). Stephen glosses over the relationship between bishop and queen, treating Ecgfrith's expulsion of Wilfrid as the result of the jealousy of Ecgfrith's next queen, Eormenburg, over Wilfrid's wealth. Neither Bede nor Stephen connects the retirement of Æthelthryth to the expulsion of the bishop; nor do they highlight the fact that Ecgfrith is succeeded by his half-brother, Aldfrith.

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61 *Ibid.*; see below, pp. 178, 179, 181; and Bede, *On the Temple*.
62 Stephen of Ripon, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, p. 37.

Expulsion provides Wilfrid with saintly trials to endure before the contingencies of military defeat and death 'punish' the kings, bringing history back into line with the narrative and conceptual structures of Christianity. Wilfrid journeys to Rome twice in efforts to regain his lands and status. Like Gregory, he considers the Church in Britain to transcend political boundaries, but the kings reject this view. Only Aldfrith's deathbed repentance and the intercession of Abbess Ælfflæd restore Wilfrid to some of his lands, shortly after which Wilfrid dies. Stephen takes pains to ensure that Wilfrid's disposition of his properties is recorded, though his conflicts continue after his death. One of the saint's few posthumous miracles takes revenge on nobles who were trying to ravage his church at Oundle.

Because of his disputes with Christian kings over land and power, Wilfrid's Life differs dramatically from those of Gregory, Cuthbert and Ceolfrith. Stephen's typological patterning calls attention to Wilfrid's virtues and reads his unique set of trials as saintly persecutions, but Wilfrid's hunger for land and social distinction resists the patterns of hagiography. Even Bede's account of him strains its seams, leaving silences where ecclesiastical and royal interests conflict.[63] In contrast, the Lives of Cuthbert fall more neatly into what become conventional hagiographical patterns. These Lives were widely transmitted and have been the subject of substantial amounts of scholarship.[64] Although Cuthbert (*c*. 634–87) accepted the episcopacy of Lindisfarne for a year in 686, he was primarily an eremitic saint on the Irish model. Despite the more conventional aspects of his *vitae*, there were almost no hagiographical models extant in Britain when the anonymous Lindisfarne author was working. Working with almost no local precedent, he and his community combined models from Rome, Gaul and Ireland to establish Cuthbert's cult and compose his *Life*.[65] Stephen drew on the anonymous *Life of St Cuthbert*, while Bede composed first a metrical version that follows the anonymous *Life* closely, then a prose version that includes new miracles. The actual lives of Cuthbert and Wilfrid overlapped, but their actions and attitudes differed. The accounts written about their differing practices generated a dialogue about sanctity, power and identity that has lasted for centuries.

If Wilfrid's life was characterized by the establishment of Roman doctrine, the crossing of boundaries and discord, Cuthbert's may characterized by a turning inward that paradoxically manifests itself in the saint's harmony with

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63 Bede weaves his account of Wilfrid through Books III–V of *HE*, with a condensed Life in V.19.

64 See Bonner *et al.* (eds.), *St Cuthbert*; and Cubitt, 'Memory and Narrative'.

65 Thacker, 'Lindisfarne'.

the outside world. Wilfrid tested the relationships between political and ecclesiastical power; Cuthbert's visions, prophecies and interactions with angels articulate the relationship between this world and the divine. Even before he joins the Church, Cuthbert is the subject of prophecy, healed by an angel, and provided with heavenly food.[66] According to Bede, his vision of Bishop Aidan being carried to heaven by angels prompts him to join the monastery.[67] Although Cuthbert never acts as a missionary, he is a great teacher, who performs miracles that bolster faith and earn him the trust of the people. For example, when Cuthbert is baptizing in the mountains, he foresees the interference of a demon, and warns his listeners. The devil creates the illusion of fire, which distracts them until the absence of smoke causes them to recognize their error and fall 'on their knees before the feet of their preacher'.[68] In another famous episode, recounted by a monk from Coldingham who spies on Cuthbert's secret vigil, sea creatures (otters, in Bede's version) dry his feet after a night of prayer immersed in the water.[69]

After transferring to Lindisfarne, Cuthbert teaches the brethren there. Although Bede emphasizes that Cuthbert distinguishes himself with many miracles, his narrative focuses on the Gregorian virtues of modesty and patience. When 'assailed by the bitter insults of his opponents' in chapter, Cuthbert would walk away, dissolving the chapter until he returned the next day to teach patiently.[70] Eventually, Cuthbert seeks greater spiritual isolation by retiring to a cell on Farne Island. Birds and men obey him, as does the earth, which brings forth a spring to provide him with water. He accepts the episcopacy of Lindisfarne against his spiritual desires, but distinguishes himself as bishop with his knowledge, kindness and patience. The Lindisfarne author adopts a passage from the *Life of St Martin* to describe Cuthbert's behaviour as bishop. Bede also adapts the passage, and Stephen uses it almost verbatim to describe Wilfrid.[71] Using Martin as a precedent, this repetition creates an identification between Cuthbert and Wilfrid as bishops, despite the many differences between their lives and careers. Bede is careful to cite authorities whenever possible, connecting Cuthbert's miracles to saintly precedents to confirm his sanctity.

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66 Anonymous *Life of St Cuthbert*, Book I in Colgrave (ed.), *Two Lives of St Cuthbert*.
67 Bede, prose *Life of St Cuthbert*, in Colgrave (ed.) *Two Lives of St Cuthbert*, iv.
68 Anonymous *Life of St Cuthbert*, II.vi.
69 *Ibid*., II.iii; Bede, prose *Life of St Cuthbert*, x.
70 Bede, prose *Life of St Cuthbert*, xvi.
71 Anonymous *Life of St Cuthbert*, IV.i; Bede, prose *Life of St Cuthbert*, xxvi; Stephen of Ripon, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, p. 25.

Although both the anonymous author and Bede emphasize Cuthbert's desire for isolation, they acknowledge that he built a guest house on Farne. Tensions between the active life and the contemplative run through both prose accounts of Cuthbert, echoing a similar focus in the *Life* of Gregory. Despite Cuthbert's desire for privacy, his sanctity attracted followers, who in turn provide the eye-witness testimony crucial to the composition of his *vitae*. The profusion of Cuthbert's miracles, which occur throughout his life, but become more concentrated in his later, hermetic years and after his death, seems to challenge the Whitby author's emphasis on the function of miracles to convert pagans. As the isolated hermit (who is not always isolated), Cuthbert prophesies and heals many illnesses. The observers who reveal Cuthbert's miracles and the distance function of writing allow Cuthbert's *vitae*, like relics, to teach, inspire and convert. The popularity of both Bede's prose *Life* and the anonymous *Life* on the continent demonstrates the importance of this holy man beyond his local community.

The anonymous *Life of Abbot Ceolfrith* and Bede's *History of the Abbots* of Wearmouth-Jarrow provide a rich background to our understanding of monastic development and practices in the north. Benedict Biscop, who founded the houses at Wearmouth-Jarrow, travelled with Wilfrid on his first trip to Rome. The books, paintings and teachers he brought back on four additional trips contributed greatly to the knowledge and material culture of the north. Benedict began life as a thane of King Oswiu. After two trips to Rome and gaining experience as abbot in Canterbury, Benedict is granted lands by Ecgfrith. He founds the church of St Peter at Wearmouth, bringing masons from France to build a stone church with glass windows. He fills this church with artwork from Rome, including images of Mary, the Apostles and the apocalypse; Bede carefully describes where he places these in the church.[72] Benedict brings John the Cantor from Rome to instruct his monks in chant, so as to foster a truly Roman community. Impressed, Ecgfrith grants him further lands, so Benedict builds the church of St Paul at Jarrow.

While Bede stresses the learning of the abbots Benedict, Eosterwine, Sigfrith, Ceolfrith and Hwætberht in this history, he also describes their humility. Eosterwine, especially, partakes in the ordinary work of the brothers: 'tantum mansit humilis, fratrumque simillimus aliorum, ut uentilare cum eis et triturare, oues uitulasque mulgere, in pistrino, in orto, in coquina, in cunctis monasterii operibus iocundus et obediens gauderet excerceri' [he kept

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72 Bede, *Historia abbatum* [*History of the Abbots*], I.vi, in *Opera historica*, vol. I (trans. Farmer, *Age of Bede*, pp. 191–3).

himself so humble and identified himself so completely with his brethren that he took a positive delight in the sharing of their ordinary work. He took his share of the winnowing and threshing, the milking of the ewes and the cows; he laboured in the bakehouse, garden and kitchen].[73] With Ecgfrith's permission, Benedict secures a privilege from Pope Agatho guaranteeing the independence of his monastery. He also makes provision for the protection of the library and ensures that the abbots who succeed him will be chosen from the house, not his family.[74] Benedict succeeds, on all counts, in actions reminiscent of Wilfrid's less successful attempts to protect and dispose of his lands.

The anonymous *Life of Abbot Ceolfrith* overlaps with Bede's *History of the Abbots*, but sheds further light on the community at Wearmouth-Jarrow. Like Cuthbert and Gregory, Ceolfrith prefers monastic peace to administrative duties, but he accedes to Benedict's repeated requests to be abbot of Jarrow. Upon Benedict's death, he oversees both houses. Ceolfrith doubles the library and secures a papal privilege for Jarrow. He orders the copying of three great pandects, one of which he intended as a gift to Rome. This survives as the Codex Amiatinus, a magnificent volume manifesting the high levels of learning and artistry fostered at Wearmouth-Jarrow. After twenty-eight years of abbacy, Ceolfrith decides to return to Rome. The hundreds of monks who see him off attest to the impressive growth of that community under his care.

Bede, Alcuin, Æthelwulf and the otherworld

Just as these early saints' Lives reflect a spiritual conception of reality that permits miraculous healings and discourse with angels, they also articulate a clear vision of the otherworld and this world's relationship to it. The promised land of salvation history is, after all, not England but heaven. Bede includes four visions of the otherworld in his *Ecclesiastical History*, the sequencing of which brings that world ever closer until hell opens right into Bernicia (*HE*, III.19, v.12–14). These visions are some of the most influential episodes of the work: Ælfric cites them as authoritative and includes them in his vernacular homilies. They were widely copied, and developed a transmission history independent of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*.[75] Alcuin and Æthelwulf draw on Bede's *History* as source and inspiration in a variety of ways, but their

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73 *Ibid.*, I.viii, pp. 371–2 (trans. Farmer, *Age of Bede*, pp. 194–5).
74 *Ibid.*, I.v, p. 368, I.xi, p. 374 (trans. Farmer, *Age of Bede*, pp. 192, 198).
75 See Rowley, *Old English Version*, chaps. 7 and 9.

combination of miracles and commemorative history calls special attention to visions of the otherworld as part of the living history of the northern kingdoms. Æthelwulf, especially, exploits the sacred space of the church as privileged point of access to the otherworldly realm of the divine.

Alcuin of York was born in Northumbria in the second quarter of the eighth century, and spent his early life at the cathedral community in York, where he was taught in the tradition of Bede. Alcuin travelled to the continent and Rome with his teacher Ælberht, who would later become archbishop of York. In 781, Alcuin met Charlemagne. He joined the Carolingian court shortly thereafter, becoming a prominent teacher, poet and abbot. According to Peter Godman, Alcuin's 'career marks the final and most fertile point of contact between Anglo-Saxon and continental scholarship in the eighth century'.[76] Alcuin was a prolific writer, as Chapter 5 above indicates, but this chapter examines his poem *On the Bishops, Kings and Saints of York* as part of the tradition of commemorative and visionary writing inspired by Bede and the 'golden age' of Northumbria.

Alcuin draws on Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and the Lives of St Cuthbert, as well as a variety of classical sources in his poem. From a celebration of the Roman founding of York, to praise of the austerities and miracles of eighth-century holy men Balthere and Echa, Alcuin condenses the full arc of English history into 1658 hexameters of heroic praise. Despite his economy, he lingers on the visions and miracles of Edwin and Oswald as exemplary saint-kings. In Alcuin's account, Oswald builds churches, which he adorns with 'praestans pretiosa … Argento, gemmis aras vestivit et auro … coronis / Sanctaque suspendit varias per tecta lucernas / esset ut in templis caeli stellantis imago' [fine gifts providing precious vessels for the office of worship. He arrayed the altars with silver, gold and jewels … lanterns he placed throughout the heavenly buildings there to represent the starry heaven].[77] Alcuin juxtaposes Wilfrid and Cuthbert as great men of York, without reference to Wilfrid's conflicts. He commits over two hundred lines to the vision of Dryhthelm. Alcuin's version, which stays extremely close to Bede's (*HE*, v.12), recounts Dryhthelm's shining guide, his visit to the abyss and sights of demons and suffering souls. He repeats Bede's image of the guide leading Dryhthelm atop the seemingly limitless wall, the shining plains and glimpse of paradise. Alcuin also repeats the dialogue in which Dryhthelm's guide teaches the thane what

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76 Godman, 'Introduction' to Alcuin, *Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, p. xxxviii.
77 Alcuin, *Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York*, lines 276–81.

he saw. In a slight innovation, the guide entreats Dryhthelm to reform his character, words and deeds upon his return to his body.[78]

Returning to the praise of 'this race of ours', Alcuin provides important information about Anglo-Saxon missionaries, and an account of Bede's accomplishments and death, including a posthumous healing miracle.[79] After a heroic account of the holy man Balthere, Alcuin describes the life of Ælberht, his teachings, travels and humility.[80] Ælberht raised an altar on the spot where Edwin was baptized and built an opulent basilica. As do Stephen and Bede, Alcuin's ekphrastic description of the ornate church, along with its architecture, ornament and altar, demarcates sacred space in the language of the heavenly Jerusalem. His description of the 'lofty building / supported by strong columns', which gleams and shines, may seem like a straightforward description of a church building, but to Alcuin's textual and spiritual community the architecture of the church was as symbolic as the geography of the otherworld described in Dryhthelm's vision. Alcuin follows his description of the church with an account of Ælberht's library at York as priceless treasure. The collection reflects the broad, international Christian textual community, plus historical, rhetorical and literary works ranging from Pliny to Cicero, Virgil, Statius and Lucan.[81] Alcuin's masterful, heroic verses create an intertextual praise poem incorporating references from this extensive library, placing Bede beside these other masters and commemorating York as a rich cultural haven.

Æthelwulf follows Alcuin's model in De abbatibus [Of the Abbots], though he commemorates not a great city but an unidentified monastic cell in Northumbria, believed to be an offshoot of Lindisfarne. Æthelwulf's poem provides information about the reign of Osred, and participates in a literary tradition of praising teachers and holy men drawing on Virgil, Ovid, Aldhelm, Bede and Alcuin. In addition to praising the abbots of the cell, Æthelwulf records a number of his own visions, emphasizing his own sense of proximity to the otherworld. He describes the founding of the cell by Eanmund, a nobleman forced into monastic life by Osred. Eanmund builds the church based on a vision of Ecgberht, a Northumbrian monk who had gone to Ireland (HE, v.9). The symbolic location is on a small hill where the monks must clear thorn bushes, which give way to the construction of a beautiful temple.[82]

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78 Ibid., lines 876–1007.
79 Ibid., lines 1289–1318.
80 Ibid., lines 1396–1534.
81 Ibid., lines 1535–60.
82 Æthelwulf, De abbatibus, VI.144.

Æthelwulf's account of the teachings of Eanmund and Ultan is reminiscent of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. As in the *History*, Æthelwulf includes visions that signal the proximity of the otherworld; these serve as warnings and signs of holiness. Merhteof's vision resembles Dryhthelm's, in that he returns from death to recount his vision and perform penance. Merhteof, however, witnesses the trial of a man who remarries after his wife's death, with the deceased wife sitting in splendour and his children acting as intercessors.[83] While punishing a widower for remarrying was not doctrinal, the striking image of the wife in her shining robes extends a vision of judgement and salvation to all men and women of the northern kingdoms.

Æthelwulf returns repeatedly to descriptions of the adornment of the church, the glass windows, the gleaming pictures and reliefs on the altars.[84] These descriptions culminate in a heavenly visitation, in which 'intrant sidereo candentem luce delubrum / spiritus' [spirits entered the church, which was shining with a starry light]. The spirits sing hymns, which 'insonuit laquearibus altis' [resounded in the domes on high]. Likening the sky to a heavenly church dome, Æthelwulf makes explicit the connection between his church and the heavens, the congregation of brothers with the gathering of spirits, though he admits that they were afraid.[85] In his own otherworldly journey, which follows closely on the heels of the spiritual visitation, Æthelwulf follows a shining guide to heavenly buildings, the descriptions of which resonate with those of Stephen, Bede and Alcuin, as well as biblical imagery.[86] Æthelwulf's historical and devotional poem in praise of the abbots and the unnamed cell demonstrates that the literary tradition developed in the large, powerful monasteries like Whitby, Wearmouth-Jarrow and York extended into the unnamed secondary houses. Though not as polished as the writings of Bede and Alcuin, Æthelwulf's poem connects his cell with those larger houses, at the same time as it places the small church on the hill in Northumbria in relation to Christian eternity.

Combined, these lives and histories show a full spectrum of early sanctity and monastic practices, while shedding light on the world of the early northern kingdoms. From Gregory and the early conversion to Cuthbert's eremitic practices, we see missionaries, Roman and Irish influences, pastoral care, active and contemplative lives. Wilfrid's struggles for authority contrast with Benedict's successful establishment at Wearmouth-Jarrow. The

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83 *Ibid.*, XI.321–94.
84 *Ibid.*, XIV and XX.
85 *Ibid.*, XXI.665–91.
86 *Ibid.*, XXII.

stewardship of abbots like Ceolfrith, Eosterwine and Eanmund created the communities that fostered not only Bede's oeuvre and the *vitae* discussed here, but also the high artistry of the early north exemplified by the Codex Amiatinus. In all of these, we see the extent to which the Anglo-Saxons engaged with, became a part of, and influenced the broad, international Christian *œcumen* of the seventh and eighth centuries.

II

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EARLY ENGLISH LITERATURE

Chapter 7

Across borders: Anglo-Saxon England and the Germanic world

ROLF H. BREMMER, JR

Anglo-Saxons were tied to the continent in many ways. Above all, Germania was their cradle: Bede tells a detailed story about their Germanic roots; to Boniface, these roots were an incentive for his missionary zeal; for the narrator of the voyages of Ohthere and Wulfstan, a fact to be mentioned with awe. Artefacts betray the Germanic origin of the settlers who arrived in Britain from 400 onwards. By 600, the culture of the ruling elite shows a much wider horizon: the gifts that accompanied the ship burial at Sutton Hoo hail from as distant places as Byzantium and Egypt. The conversion drew the Anglo-Saxons into a cultural world in which the Mediterranean and Judaeo-Christian element was dominant but which afforded a legitimate place for the Germanic world from which the Anglo-Saxons originated and to which they remained tied not only linguistically. The seventh-century Franks Casket emits this identity in both image and word (see Chapter 3 above): visually, Weland the Smith flanks the adoration of the Magi, and Old English text in runic characters accompanies Latin text in roman script. The Anglo-Saxons so much belonged to the 'old world' that *Beowulf*, though written in England and in English, is set completely in the (north) Germanic world. This chapter, then, charts relations between continental Germanic cultures in and beyond the British Isles from Tacitus and Bede to such poems as *Waldere*, *Widsith*, *Finnsburh*, the Leiden Riddle, the *Hildebrandslied*, *Heliand* and *Genesis*, and examines the cultural and aesthetic work of texts such as these. The chapter also invites a meditation on the powerful cultural traffic between the Germanic world (Francia, Frisia, Saxony) and the English.

Borders and identities

Borders presuppose the presence of spaces, territories and domains which have elements in common that differ from what lies outside. Such spaces

can be physical and virtual. Hadrian's Wall, for example, was erected to demarcate visibly, solidly and menacingly the northern limit of the Romans' sway over Britain from around 125. However, in Anglo-Saxon England this monument of Roman imperialism had lost its original delimiting (and controlling) function – borders are clearly by no means permanently fixed but prove to be prone to change over time. King Offa, in his turn, constructed between 757 and 796 the dyke named after him, a visual mark in the landscape to give relief to the bounds of his Mercian (= 'borderland') kingdom vis-à-vis the territory of neighbouring Welsh tribes. Virtual borders, on the other hand, such as those that draw the line(s) between ethnic groups and their cultures, are more difficult to pencil in. In recent decades, the concept of ethnicity has been hotly debated, also with respect to the early Middle Ages. Critics have come to realize that modern concepts of ethnicity and group identity are political and sociological assumptions that were too often projected onto the past and that our own ideas of what constitutes a nation, a people or a tribe do not necessarily concur with medieval views. Notably the notion of 'Germanic' has been subjected to drastic criticism, no doubt in part because of the ideological contamination the term had contracted during the first half of the twentieth century. A major objection that has been raised is to the nineteenth-century philological premise that a shared language implies a shared community and ethnic identity.[1] Equally, if perhaps less charged with abject political and ideological overtones, the concept of 'Celtic' has been under discussion and re-evaluated.[2] I am aware that the Anglo-Saxons did not use the adjective 'Germanic'; nevertheless, for want of a better term, I shall use it in a variety of senses in this chapter: first, as a geographic term with reference to the area that today comprises southern Scandinavia and the north-west of the European continent from, broadly, the Rhine delta to the Elbe estuary; second, as a signifier of language; and third, to indicate a shared cultural ambit – admittedly a somewhat vague concept which includes such diverse constituents as poetic techniques, narrative matter and religion – to demarcate the space from where the Anglo-Saxons originally hailed, and to the customs of which they related and elements of which contributed to shape and maintain their identity.

1 Pohl, 'Ethnic Names'; Kulikowski, 'Nation versus Army', p. 69, note 2; Beck, 'Concept of Germanic Antiquity'; S. J. Harris, 'Overview of Race and Ethnicity'.
2 Schmidt, 'Celtic Problem'.

The Anglo-Saxons' cultural baggage

Already during Roman rule, Britain saw the arrival of groups consisting of mainly males from Germania who served in the legions, but immigration from across the sea peaked in the course of the fifth century, after Rome had withdrawn its last legion from Britain in 407. Whatever their tribal backgrounds, and whether or not they came in small bands, operating separately, or in larger coherent groups, linguistic evidence makes clear that the immigrants spoke a language that corresponds closely to dialects used on the lower plains of Germany and the North Sea littoral, strongly suggesting that those were the regions from whence they had come. According to the Danish linguist Hans Frede Nielsen, who investigated the linguistic parallels between Old English and the other Germanic languages: 'Old English is more closely related to Old Frisian than any other Germanic language.'[3] Frisian was spoken along the coast facing England, from about the Scheldt estuary to the mouth of the Weser. The Germanic language of the Anglo-Saxon invaders differed markedly in several important systematic respects (phonology, morphology, lexis and syntax) not only from Latin as it was spoken at the time in Britain both by Roman administrators and by Romanized Britons, but also from the indigenous languages (Brittonic and, in the far north, Pictish). Latin, however, was not new to the invaders: for centuries they had communicated with Romans in and outside their homelands as traders and mercenaries. The relatively large number of Latin words they had adopted before setting sail to Britain bears witness to their familiarity with Roman ways of life – e.g., OE *belt* 'girdle' < L *balteus*; OE *cycene* 'kitchen' < L *cucina*; OE *weall* 'wall' < L *vallum*; OE *cyse* 'cheese' < L *caseum* – amounting to some 170 words in all.[4] On the other hand, knowledge of British among the invaders will have been negligible, so that communication with the Britons will have initially been conducted most likely in some form of Latin. Rather than being the defenceless victims of large-scale massacres and ethnic cleansing that previous generations of scholars thought they could detect, many Britons must have made an effort to master the language of the invaders and eventually dropped their own.

Until recently, on account of the handful of British loans in Old English, it was held that there was very little linguistic interaction between the two groups, but new approaches based on contact linguistics are increasingly

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3 Nielsen, *Old English*, p. 273; see also Bremmer, Jr, *Introduction to Old Frisian*, pp. 125–8.
4 Kastovsky, 'Semantics and Vocabulary', pp. 300–4.

making clear that the influence of British-speakers on early English is to be found not in the vocabulary but in the phonology and the syntax.[5] Other evidence of communication between the natives and the newcomers is offered by place names, more particularly by topographical names, ranging from rivers (Thames, Severn, Avon), place names (London, York) to kingdoms (Kent, Deira, Bernicia).[6] However, closer study has brought to light that the invaders adopted such names without grasping their meaning, for Celtic place-name elements were rarely used productively by the Anglo-Saxons to coin new place names.[7] A limited openness towards the Britons on the part of the Anglo-Saxons also appears from the early adoption of Celtic personal names in both the lower and higher strata of society, as exemplified by Cædmon, the cowherd/singer, Ceadda, bishop of Lichfield, and his brother Cedd, bishop of London: these three names contain the British etymon *catu 'war';[8] the name of Cerdic, the founder of the West Saxon royal dynasty, derives from *carat- 'beloved'.[9] King Oswiu of Bernicia (c. 612–70) was able to converse with his third wife, the British princess Rieinmelth of Rheged, in her own language. According to [Pseudo-]Nennius, he was proficient in Irish, a skill that Bede also ascribes to his brother King Oswald – but their children all had Anglo-Saxon names. On the whole, it appears that Celtic names are rarely found for Anglo-Saxons after 700. Rather, Germanic names and the Germanic system of name-giving were favoured almost exclusively among lay and clergy alike, until at least the Norman Conquest.[10] A notable exception seems to be the nobleman Cumbra, who adhered longest to the deposed West Saxon King Sigeberht, who despite Cumbra's loyalty killed him nonetheless, as told in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, s.a. 755. His name means 'of the Welsh' or 'the Welshman', but is most likely to have been a nickname rather than his 'real' name.

The basic principle of the Anglo-Saxon (and pan-Germanic) tradition of coining personal names is combining two elements, or 'themes', which together make up a dithematic name, such as Æthel-ric and Wulf-stan. The constituents could be varied with great resourcefulness, yielding other names

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5 E.g., the realization of OE /kw/ as /(h)w/ in such words as /(h)wɪk/ 'quick' and /(h)wi:m/ 'pleasant' from OE cwic and cweme, respectively; see Laker, 'British Celtic Influence', pp. 156–70; and Trudgill, 'What Really Happened to Old English'.
6 Hough, '(Non-)Survival'.
7 Coates, 'Invisible Britons'.
8 Van Els, Kassel Manuscript, pp. 130–1.
9 Parsons, 'British Caraticos'.
10 C. Clark, 'Onomastics', pp. 456–64.

such as *Æthel-stan* and *Wulf-ric*. Clark points out that out of the almost ninety Anglo-Saxon name themes found in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, seventy have a counterpart in West Germanic names, and about sixty in Scandinavian names.[11] Apparently, such numbers show that the tradition was open to innovation and loss within the stock of Germanic names, yet the basic principle was wholeheartedly adhered to among the Anglo-Saxons.

In religious respects, too, the Germanic invaders differed from the Britons, who by 400 had widely adopted Christianity. Though their vocabulary (e.g., *cyrice* 'church', *biscop* 'bishop') shows that they were probably not wholly ignorant of the Christian religion,[12] the invaders brought with them a polytheistic religion in which such gods as Tiw, Woden, Thunor and Frige were worshipped, as is evidenced, for example, by place names. The appearance of Germanic deities in *Tiwesdæg*, *Wodnesdæg*, *Thunresdæg* and *Frigesdæg* dates back to the fourth century and had been carried with the invaders from their homelands. However, their presence in place names, e.g., Wensley (< *Wodnesleah* 'Wodan's grove'), Thunderley (< *Thunresleah*), but also such names as Harrow (< *hearg* 'pagan sanctuary') and Weedon (< *weoh* 'sanctuary' + *dun* 'hill'), testifies to an active practice of cultic rites before the Anglo-Saxons were converted to Christianity, sometimes with the specification of which gods were involved.[13] Finally, royal genealogies, a small but widespread text genre dating back in writing to the early seventh century, but most likely with roots in an even more distant oral past,[14] also preserve evidence of a Germanic pagan past.[15] Woden appears in these lists of ancestors as the founder of the royal houses of, among others, Northumbria, Kent and Wessex, while the rather obscure god Saxneat, 'companion of the Saxons' (who appears as 'Saxnot' in an Old Saxon baptismal creed), somewhat surprisingly in view of the name, served in that function for the East Anglian kings. The ancestral religion of the Anglo-Saxons comprised more than the veneration of gods (*os*, pl. *ese*). Other entities with roots in the Germanic mythological world abounded, at least in so far as the Old English language reflects this aspect of culture, such as elves (*ylfe*), giants (*entas*, *eotenas*, *þyrsas*), dwarves (*dweorgas*, *pucan*),

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11 *Ibid*., pp. 456–7.
12 D. H. Green, *Language and History*, pp. 301–5; Wollmann, 'Early Christian Loan-Words', pp. 178–9.
13 Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, pp. 154–61, with further bibliographical references.
14 Cf. Moisl, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies'.
15 C. R. Davis, 'Cultural Assimilation'.

forest-dwellers (*wuduwasan*), water-monsters (*niceras*) and spectres of uncertain description or abode (*scinnan*, *scuccan*).[16]

At least as important as the religious legacy was the legal tradition to which the invaders subscribed. Their laws are a remarkably early example of the use of the vernacular in comparison to other Germanic peoples, as Lisi Oliver discusses further in Chapter 20 below. Barely a few years after his crossover to Christianity, King Æthelberht of Kent promulgated a set of laws, the core of which reflects the essence of what is considered to be Germanic, viz. a long list of compensation tariffs to redress the injuries inflicted in violent feuding encounters.[17] Æthelberht's laws, issued *c.* 604, survive only in an early twelfth-century manuscript, yet its vocabulary and phraseology are archaic,[18] and some of it, for example an expression referring to a wound as *banes bite* 'a bite of bone' – metaphorically turning the sword into a voracious animal – is paralleled in Old Frisian *benes biti*, while hapax *feaxfang* 'seizing by the hair' has a unique parallel in Old Frisian *faxfeng*; like their Kentish counterparts, the Frisian terms also appear in a list of compensations for injuries.[19] This legal tradition was cherished by King Alfred in the ninth century. In the prologue to his laws, he is careful to state that he has honoured the laws of his predecessors, including those of Æthelberht of Kent and of his ancestor Ine, who ruled Wessex from 688 to 726. Yet Alfred also takes great pains to inscribe his laws into the mainstream of Christian tradition by beginning his *domboc* with a generous translation of Mosaic law, amounting to almost one-fifth of the entire text.[20]

Another element of the culture in which the invaders had participated before they crossed the sea that merits attention is the writing system which they brought along: the runic script. Where precisely this script originated is hard to establish, but it is a medium of written communication that is found only among Germanic-speaking nations, from Goths to Alemanni and from Swedes to Frisians. Due to certain shared phonetic developments in both English and Frisian, new characters were added to the *futhark*, as the original

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16 An up-to-date survey and analysis of the pre-Christian religion and world-view of the Anglo-Saxons in the light of new developments is wanting. For a first exploration, see G. R. Owen, *Rites and Religions*. North, *Heathen Gods*, offers a wealth of information but the interpretation is often speculative. A. Hall, *Elves*, presents an attractive close-up of one aspect.
17 Wormald, 'Leges Barbarorum', pp. 33–4; cf. Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 39: 'To deny the Germanic origin of feud-centred law verges on perversity.'
18 Oliver (ed.), *Beginnings of English Law*, pp. 25–34.
19 Munske, *Der germanische Rechtswortschatz*, §§298, 407; Lendinara, 'Kentish Laws', p. 220.
20 Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 416–23.

row of twenty-four runes is termed, now called *futhorc*.[21] The use of these new runes by both Anglo-Saxons and Frisians is indicative of their close cultural ties.

Furthermore, the way the Anglo-Saxons composed their poems also locates them within the wider Germanic space. The earliest line of Germanic poetry dates to *c*. 400 and is found written in runes on one of two magnificently ornamented golden horns discovered at Gallehus, Denmark:

/   /   /   /

ek **h**lewagastiR **h**oltijaR   **h**orna tawido

[I Hlewagast [son] of Holt horn made]

The long line, identifying the workman, is typically characterized by alliteration (here indicated by bold type) and a four-beat metre that is also the stamp of Old English poetry. Much of the Anglo-Saxon poetic diction is also found in Old High German and Old Saxon poetry, or, for that matter, in Old Frisian legal prose.[22] Until into the eleventh century, Anglo-Saxon poets held on to this inherited format, although they were also familiar with (Latin) syllabic rhyming poetry, which they practised so rarely in the vernacular, however, that the only Old English poem adhering to the Romance verse technique has become known as *The Riming Poem*.

The *Adventus Saxonum* in Anglo-Saxon historiographical and other texts

Their farewell to ancestral shores and the subsequent landfall and invasion of Britain, later known as the *Adventus Saxonum*, must have made an incisive impression on the collective memory, one would think. Yet no celebratory narratives of this feat on any significant scale, shaping or confirming their group identity, have survived that can be dated with any confidence to the first century after their arrival. All we have is a report of a scattering of landings, battles and conquests entered in the early annals of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and even this information must be considered with some suspicion, as it has been cogently argued that such details were 'invented' by the ninth-century compilers of the Chronicle in order to legitimate the rule of the West Saxon dynasty.[23] Bede's famous account in his *Historia ecclesiastica* (I.xv) of the arrival of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes – a notoriously complex

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21 Page, *Introduction to English Runes*, chap. 3.
22 Kellogg, 'South Germanic Oral Tradition'; Bremmer, Jr, 'Dealing Dooms', pp. 86–7.
23 Kleinschmidt, '*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*'.

narrative[24] – is based partly on bookish knowledge, partly on oral tradition and partly on his own imagination.[25] For an imaginative as well as biased description we must turn to early British sources. Gildas (516–70) presents the arrival of 'the fierce and impious *Saxones*, a race most hateful both to God and men' in highly ornate style, but with very few hard facts, in his *De excidio et conquestu Brittanniae* [*On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain*]. They were invited by the British King Vortigern and his counsellors to oppose the Picts and the Scots and arrived in 'three, as they call it in their language, *cyulis* [keels], *longis nauibus* [long boats, i.e., war ships] in ours'. Significantly, Gildas shows familiarity with this Anglo-Saxon naval term, which is indicative of the cultural-linguistic interface between the indigenous population and the incoming conquerors.[26] Bede's information that the Saxons arrived in 'tribus longis nauibus' [three long boats] derives from this passage in Gildas. Much more romantic is the account presented in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* [*History of the Britons*], traditionally ascribed to the Welshman Nennius. Nennius recounts in direct speech the negotiations between Hengist, the leader of the Saxons, and King Vortigern, who later falls in love with Hengist's beautiful daughter, whom he is given as his wife in return for Kent. After some years the Saxons invite the king and three hundred of his nobles and officers for a feast, but treacherously, at Hengist's cry 'Nimed eure saxes' [Take your knives] – again, an indication of British linguistic awareness – they butcher all the nobles except for Vortigern who then is compelled to concede Essex, Sussex and Middlesex, and much more, to Hengist. Significantly, both Gildas and Nennius insert English into their narratives, an indication of the direction in which the transfer of culture moved. Nennius himself explicitly states that he used Saxon annals for his history.

The absence of a more or less elaborate narrative, whether written or, possibly, oral, of their exodus from Germania and entrance into Britain does not mean that all memory of it had been erased. When King Alfred in a long and friendly letter to Bishop Wærferth of Worcester announced his ambitious programme for an educational offensive in his kingdom, one of the means he mentioned to bring his plans into effect was the translation of a number of books that he considered to be 'niedbeðearfosta ... eallum monnum to wiotonne' [most needful for all people to know].[27] Alfred did not specify these books in his letter, but we can reconstruct with a great degree of

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24 See Merrills, *History and Geography*, chap. 4 'Bede'.
25 Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths*, chaps. 3 and 5.
26 Thier, 'Language and Technology', pp. 191–3.
27 Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, vol. i, p. 7.

reliability what they were. Bishop Wærferth, for example, took upon himself the challenging task of making Gregory the Great's *Dialogi* available in English, as one of a number of books that dealt specifically with the organization of the Church and instruction in various aspects of the Christian faith. Some of the books that Alfred singled out for his purpose were of a historiographic nature, notably Orosius' *Historia adversum paganos* and, perhaps, Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*.[28] Falling outside the translation project, but certainly also initiated by Alfred with an eye to recording the history of his kingdom, is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Together these three works, no matter how different in origin and content they are, were intended to position the Anglo-Saxons in time and space, relative both to their place in the world at large and to the Catholic Church within it.

Orosius, born in Galicia around 375, was an ordained priest who played a prominent part in the Church of his day, which was troubled by the controversial teachings of the Briton ascetic Pelagius concerning the origin of sin and man's free will. For advice Orosius travelled to Augustine in Hippo and one result of their encounter was that he carried out Augustine's suggestion of writing a world history intended to demonstrate that the present calamitous condition of the Roman Empire had nothing to do with the steadily growing number of Romans becoming Christians. Rather, Orosius argued, history teaches us that kingdoms come and kingdoms go, not arbitrarily but through God's decisions; now it seemed that it was the turn of the Roman Empire to close the pages of its history.

After a brief exposition, dedicated to Augustine, on the purpose of his work, Book I.i of Orosius' *Historia* sets out to give a detailed geographical description of the world, divided into Asia, Europe and Africa, before the historiographical narrative itself commences. The Anglo-Saxon translator, however, skipped the dedicatory introduction, which he apparently deemed irrelevant to his intended readership, with the result that the Old English Orosius begins as follows: 'Ure ieldran ealne þisne ymbhwyrfþ þises middangeardes, cwæþ Orosius, swa swa Oceanus utan ymbligeþ, þone [mon] garsæcg hateð, on þreo todældon' [Our ancestors, said Orosius, divided the entire orbit of this middle-earth, just as the Ocean, which [our] people call 'garsæcg', surrounds it, into three]. This is a rather circumlocutory rendering of Orosius' concise 'Maiores nostri orbem

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28 Bately (ed.), *Old English Orosius*. Whether Alfred commissioned the translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* is a moot point (see Pratt, 'Problems of Authorship'). Most recently, Sharon Rowley has adduced strong arguments to view the Old English Bede as a translation independent from Alfred's educational programme (see Rowley, *Old English Version*, esp. pp. 54–6).

totius terrae, Oceanus limbo circumsaeptum, triquadrum statuere' [Our ances-
tors fixed a threefold division of the whole world, surrounded by a periphery of
the Ocean].[29] The opening sentence of the Old English translation may seem
factual at a first glance, but it is rather a proclamation that connects and blends
two worlds: classical Rome and contemporary England. The translator has
achieved this feat, first of all, by adopting Orosius' 'maiores nostri' and render-
ing the phrase as 'ure ieldran'. In doing so, he appropriates for himself and his
Anglo-Saxon readership/audience a natural participation in the learned legacy
of the Roman world. Next, the interrupting information 'cwæþ Orosius' intro-
duces the original author of the book not as a writer but as a speaker, thus
drawing his authority out of the realm of foreign Latin literacy into that of native
English orality. The act of speaking casts Orosius in the role of the authoritative
wise man who has stored the past of his nation in his memory only to share it
with its present members; what Orosius 'said' was by implication heard by the
anonymous speaker/translator and communicated to the audience, albeit ren-
dered in the scholarly medium of writing rather than recited in elevated verse.
Finally, interrupting once more the syntax of the introductory sentence, the
translator links the mythical world of Rome to that of the Anglo-Saxons by
providing for 'Oceanus' the explanatory gloss 'garsecg', a term that quite
naturally comes with 'middangeard',[30] for the earth lies in the middle when it
is surrounded by the sea.

   We see a similar approach to actualizing Orosius' text at the conclusion of
Book I.i. Orosius' geographical horizon, which ended with a statement about
the Rhine and the Danube, was found to be insufficient for contemporary
expectations when it came to a description of the northern parts of Europe.
Hence the Old English text enumerates in some detail the 'many nations'
that live in a space which is called in its entirety 'Germania' – the translator
retained the learned Latin term, apparently in the absence of a native name
for the region. East Franks, Swabians, Bavarians, Old Saxons, Frisians –
almost fifty nations, lands, rivers, seas and mountains, some more than
once, are paraded in directional relation to each other (e.g., 'to the north
of the Thuringians are the Old Saxons, and to the north-west of them are
the Frisians'). Immediately after this seemingly bewildering, yet orderly
arranged, cascade of names follow the accounts of the voyages of Ohthere
and Wulfstan. Reporting Ohthere's exploration of the northernmost coasts

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29 Bately (ed.), *Old English Orosius*, p. 8, lines 11–13.
30 The *DOE* Corpus yields thirteen proximity instances of *garsecg* with *middangeard/
    middaneard*; *garsecg* is 'a notoriously difficult word to explain': see Lucas (ed.), *Exodus*,
    line 490b, note.

of Scandianvia and Wulfstan's visit to the Baltic tribe of the *Este*, respectively, each account in its turn brings up more names of lands, rivers, seas and peoples, crossing borders all the time. The purpose of all this additional geographical and ethnographical information in the Old English version of Orosius' history seems clear: the northern part of Europe bears a significant relation to the world of the Anglo-Saxons, a significance that is spelled out in so many words when the reporter of Ohthere's voyage, at the mention of Hedeby, adds in an aside that 'on þæm landum eardodon Engle, ær hi hider on land comon' [In these lands the English dwelled before they came here to (this) land (i.e., England)].[31]

A comparable concern with geographical matters and ethnic origin is met with in the Old English translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*.[32] First, in Book I.i, the island of Britain is positioned as 'opposite, though far apart', to 'Germanie, Gallie and Hispanie', 'the chief divisions of Europe', abridging the Latin source text with its detailed geographical preface but retaining its essence. On the other hand, no such condensation of the original text is employed in the Old English Bede later on, in Book I.xii (= *HE*, I.15), in which Bede presents his account of the arrival of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes. Whatever we may think of the historicity of this origin narrative, the translator clearly took great pains to impart this chapter integrally to his audience. Likewise, when Bede reports Bishop Ecgbert's missionary programme for Germany, the translator again does not economize, but tells us that many nations ('manig cynna', translating Bede's 'plurimas ... nationes') were living in Germania, 'þonon Ongle & Seaxan cumene wæron, ðe nu Breotene eardiað' [from where the Angles and Saxons had come who now inhabit Britain].[33] However, the translator discards Bede's remark that the Britons miscall their neighbours 'Garmans' ('Garmani') because the Angles and Saxons had come from Germania, the anecdote having apparently lost its actuality after the more than 150 years since Bede had finished his book. Bede's concern with geographic origin is not limited to his *Historia ecclesiastica*; it also emerges in his *De temporum ratione*, chap. xv 'De mensibus Anglorum', where he punningly explains the vernacular term 'trimilchi' [three milkings] for the month of 'maius' [May] on account of its 'ubertas' ('abundance'; the Latin noun is derived from *uber* 'udder') that once

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31 Bately (ed.), *Old English Orosius*, p. 16, lines 18–19.
32 Miller (ed. and trans.), *Old English Bede*.
33 For a detailed analysis of this passage, which has often erroneously been taken as including a list of the Germanic tribes that invaded Britain, see Benskin, 'Bede's Frisians'.

prevailed in Britain as well as in Germania 'de qua in Britanniam natio intravit Anglorum' [from where the nation of the Angles/English came to Britain].[34]

The early ninth-century author of the calendrically organized *Old English Martyrology*, in his turn, could not resist the attraction of this piece of etymological information and included a translation of the entire passage from Bede in his introduction to the month of May.[35] Boniface, a West Saxon near-contemporary of Bede's, had earlier expressed this sense of relatedness, when in 738, newly appointed 'legate of the Universal Church in Germania', he wrote from his mission post to all his fellow clergymen and clergywomen, indeed to all Catholics in England, to remember his evangelizing work among the pagan Saxons in their prayers. To underline the urgency of his request, Boniface added that the Saxons had repeatedly pointed out their shared origin to him by making use of a consanguinity metaphor: 'De uno sanguine et de uno osse sumus' [We are of one and the same blood and bone].[36]

The Alfredian translation of Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae*, too, keeps a window open on matters Germanic in what would seem to be an attempt at bridging the world between the West Saxons and the Romans. Both the prose version and the metres of the Old English Boethius deviate from any Latin version circulating around 900 in that they give an account of the Goths sacking Rome (in 410). The metrical preface positions King Alfred as the owner of a repository of ancient songs that he dutifully shares with his people to expel any possible idleness and vainglory. The persona of the poet in his turn is eager to pass on the message:

> Ðus Ælfred us   ealdspell reahte,
> cyning Westsexna,   cræft meldode,
> leoðwyrhta list.   Him wæs lust micel
> ðæt he ðiossum leodum   leoð spellode,
> monnum myrgen,   mislice cwidas,
> þy læs ælinge   ut adrife
> selflicne secg,   þonne he swelces lyt
> gymð for his gilpe.   Ic sceal giet sprecan,
> fon on fitte,   folccuðne ræd
> hæleðum secgean.   Hliste se þe wille.

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34 Bede, *Opera de temporibus*, p. 212, lines 34–7.

35 Kotzor (ed.), *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, vol. II, p. 72: 'forðon swylc genihtsumnes wæs geo on Brytone ond eac on Germania lande, of ðæm Ongla ðeod com on þas Breotene, þæt hi on þæm monðe þriwa on dæge mylcedon heora neat' [because there was once such a plenty in Britain and also in Germania, from where the nation of the English came to Britain, that in that month they milked their cows three times a day].

36 Boniface *et al.*, *Briefe des Bonifatius*, no. 45, lines 21–2.

[Thus Alfred told us an old story, the king of the West Saxons revealed his skill, his ability in making songs. He had a great desire to announce songs to these people, a delight to men, a variety of stories, so that boredom would not drive out the selfish man, when he is hardly concerned with it because of his own fame. I yet must speak, arrange in verse, tell public advice to men. Listen, who will!][37]

Immediately after this call for attention, Metre 1 swerves back to a distant past when the Goths, subdivided into two peoples, began their march on Rome. The diction used by the author is reminiscent of that which characterizes heroic poetry:

> Hit wæs geara iu   ðætte Gotan eastan
> of Sciððia   sceldas læddon,
> þreate geþrungon   þeodlond monig,
> setton suðweardes   sigeþeoda twa;
> Gotena rice   gearmælum weox.

[It was years ago that Goths carried their shields from the east, from Scythia, pressed with their crowd many a nation, set out to the south, two victorious nations; the realm of the Goths increased year by year.][38]

The verse account continues by narrating the Gothic conquest of Italy from *Muntgiop*[39] to *Sicilia* – the geographic space is emphatically indicated – inspired by creative imagination more than factual knowledge based on the prose Boethius (or indeed on any other traceable written source), to end with the accession of Theoderic. The Anglo-Saxons, from Bede onwards, strongly associated the Goths' sacking of Rome with the end of the Roman Empire,[40] and it may well be that Alfred (or the Alfredian translator) here expanded so much on this incisive event because it reminded him of the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain.

The above survey makes clear that among a variety of literate Anglo-Saxons, whether from Northumbria or Wessex, there lived an interest in the Germanic world, not just in the lie of the land but, above all, because they were aware that their ultimate roots lay in the expanse east of the North Sea.

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37 Godden and Irvine (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius*, p. 384, lines 1–10 (my translation).
38 *Ibid.*, lines 11–15. Cf. 'geara iu' in line 11 with 'geardagum' [in days of yore] in the opening line of *Beowulf*.
39 From *Mons Jovis*. The Germanicized name for the Alps is occasionally used in Old English: see the commentary in Bately (ed.), *Old English Orosius*, pp. 285–6, at 99/24; and Simek, *Altnordische Kosmographie*, *s.v.* Mundiafjall.
40 Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons and the Goths'.

Two *scops'* windows on the world

The interest in lands and peoples in Germania that we saw expressed in the writings of Bede and the Orosius and Boethius translators appears in an even more impressive way in *Widsith*, a poem that advertises the repertoire of Widsith, the persona of this poem, who stages himself as a singer of stories (54).[41] His name signifies 'Long Journey', but is usually loosely translated as 'Far Traveller' – *siþ* is not an agent noun – and is not found elsewhere among the Anglo-Saxon repertory of names. Apparently it is a nom de plume which the poet had adopted for the persona to express the geographic space he had covered and the narrative matter that he had assembled during his journeys: 'Forþon ic mæg singan and secgan spell' [54; therefore I can sing and tell stories]. Indeed, in the opening lines, Widsith claims to have travelled most widely of all men on earth (2–3). He traces his origin to the Myringas, a tribe that is generally located in South Holstein, one of the traditional homelands of the Anglo-Saxons. Widsith proudly slates his expertise: he was appointed to conduct Ealhhild as a bride from 'eastan of Ongle' [8; from the east out of Angeln] to Eormanric, king of the (Ostro-)Goths. With this expedition Widsith lives up to his name, but in addition it makes him a time-traveller. Several of the rulers he mentions by name are known to us through history. Eormanric, for example, committed suicide in 375; Ætla (i.e., Attila the Hun, 18, 122) died in 453; Theodric (24) ruled the Franks from 511 to 534; Ælfwine (i.e., Alboin), who is lavished with praise by Widsith for his generosity (70–4), was king of the Lombards from 567 to 572. Historical rulers who lived almost two centuries apart are presented by Widsith as his contemporaries. To the poet (and his audience) such a condensation of time may not have been occasion for scruple, because what mattered was the highlighting of the formative period in Germanic self-consciousness: the time of the Germanic migrations that eventually caused the collapse of the Roman Empire and brought the Anglo-Saxons to Britain. The poet's perspective, as Joyce Hill points out, is clearly from England, because Widsith's journey begins in the east (that is, seen from England).[42] Thus, both orientation and location fix the audience's attention to the place and time from where their ancestors long ago upped their sticks. It can hardly be fortuitous, either, that Widsith was to set out with Ealhhild as a 'fælre freoþuwebban' [6; dear peace-weaver] to precisely Eormanric, even though the latter is immediately qualified as a 'cruel traitor' (9). Eormanric's reputation may have been bad (in the poem *Deor* he is given a 'wolfish mind'), but he was nonetheless king of the

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41 In the following, all line references to *Widsith*, *Deor*, *Waldere* and the *Finnsburh Fragment* follow Hill (ed.), *Old English Minor Heroic Poems*.
42 *Ibid.*, p. 119, *s.v.* Ongel.

renowned Goths and showed himself a generous man to Widsith during his embassy with the Goths (88–92).

When Widsith has presented his credentials, he feels qualified to display the breadth and width of his poetic repertoire in, at times for us (and perhaps for many a member of his audience too) rather long, metrical lists with very compact information on tribes and their rulers. Each of these three enumerations follows a different syntactic pattern. Thus, the first list (18–35) consists of 'A ruled B-dative-plural' – 'Ætla weold Hunum' – with the verb frequently in ellipsis; the second list (57–88) varies on the formula 'I was with B-dative-plural' – 'ic wæs mid Hunum'; while the third list (110–24) is patterned as 'B-accusative-singular visited I' – 'Heðcan sohte ic' – turning to individuals rather than to groups. The poem's three lists or 'catalogues' are preceded by and interspersed with short allusions to Widsith's personal experiences and events of the heroic past that we would like to be longer than they actually are. We hear of Offa who ruled the Angles, a brave man if ever there was one (35–44). Barely in his teens, he defeated Alewih, ruler of the Danes, and with one sword he carved the border of his realm at the river Eider (or *Fifeldore* 'giant's ?door' as it is called in the poem) between the Myrings and the Angles. The anecdote has often been taken as a courtesy to his namesake, the Mercian King Offa, whose genealogy makes him a descendant of this heroic man.[43] In one breath (45–9), Widsith discloses that he knows about Hrothgar and Hroth(w)ulf and their ties of kinship (paternal uncle and nephew), their feud with Ingeld and his Heothobards and how they defeated them in Hrothgar's hall Heorot – prominent names and events in *Beowulf*.[44] A few lines earlier, varying on the syntactic pattern of the first list of names, Widsith had mentioned almost simultaneously Finn Folcwalding, leader of the Frisians, and Hnæf of the Hocings, both of whom we know from the Finnsburh Episode in *Beowulf* and from the *Finnsburh Fragment*. Moreover, Finn had also been afforded a place in Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies.

By general consent, *Widsith* has been dated early by the critics, notwithstanding its unique survival in the late tenth-century Exeter Book; most are agreed on the seventh century for its date of composition. However, if this is really the case, the text was not then finalized and closed, but remained open to changes and additions across the centuries. Despite the fact that the brief narrative passages refer to people and incidents that can be linked to or located in the North German

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43 On the possible political and social relevance of *Widsith* to a tenth-century audience, see Niles, '*Widsith*, the Goths, and the Anthropology of the Past' in his *Old English Heroic Poems*.

44 Fulk *et al.* (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*. All references to *Beowulf* are to this edition.

Plain and Scandinavia, the second list shows some remarkable peoples that Widsith has visited: Israelites and Syrians, Hebrews and Indians and Egyptians, Medes and Persians (82–4). The poet's accrediting such a wide horizon to Widsith points to knowledge of the Bible and classical learning and can therefore scarcely be reconcilable with a seventh-century date of composition. Somewhere sometime along the road to the text that we have now in the late tenth-century Exeter Book, someone enlarged Widsith's list to accommodate it to the meanwhile expanded Anglo-Saxon horizon. A similar adaptive influence is discernible in the first closure of the poem, uttered in the first person: 'I have always found out on my travels that he who is dearest to the people of his land is he whom God gives the government of the realm of his people as long as he lives here' (131–4). The appearance of the word 'God' betrays a Christian understanding of divine support for a ruler, because before the conversion this word was not used as a name to indicate a/the supreme deity.[45]

The simultaneous presence in *Widsith* of his wandering through the world of a glorious Germanic past and the unobtrusive Christian wisdom of the Anglo-Saxon present which the poet claims to have gained from his experience, the old native tradition and the new foreign religion, confronts us with a reality that accounts for all Anglo-Saxon textual culture and for much of the material culture, too, inasmuch as it dates to after the conversion: there is neither text nor narrative nor even genre that we can call purely Germanic. Just as the Anglo-Saxon language from an early period onwards was open and receptive to including words from neighbours who spoke different languages, likewise narrators and singers proved not averse to including in their repertoire matter from new cultures with which they had been confronted over a longer period of time (a process called 'acculturation'). We even have evidence of the clergy sometimes following a policy that facilitated the inclusion of new ideas and representations in the traditional cultural vehicles ('inculturation').[46] Exemplary for the latter approach is Pope Gregory's coaching of the first missionaries, as reported by Bede (*HE*, I.30). Upon the missionary Bishop Mellitus' question of what to do with the pagan temples, Gregory advised him not to destroy them, but to remove and destroy the idols, cleanse the buildings with holy water and replace them with altars and relics so that the true God could be worshipped. In this way, the newly converted would be given the opportunity to still follow the well-trodden path to the same sanctuaries as their forebears had visited, but which had now been refurbished and adapted

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45 D. H. Green, *Language and History*, pp. 15–16.
46 Roest Crollius, 'Inculturation'.

to new rituals. Likewise, Gregory counselled Mellitus not to abolish the local custom of sacrificing cattle in the autumn but to 'convert' these festivities and maintain the butchering, but now in praise of God.[47]

A blend of the Germanic narrative heritage with elements of the new religion similar to that we saw emerging in *Widsith* is also found in *Deor*. This fairly short poem of forty-two lines challenges the audience's knowledge (and ours) of legend from the length and breadth of the Germanic space, contained within the time-span of the migrations. In semi-stanzaic form, the poet allusively parades five moments from the narrative cycles of five celebrities: Weland, who suffered being maimed by King Nithhad; Beadohild, who could not care less for her brothers' death when she painfully discovered herself to be pregnant; Mæthhild, who became entangled in a love affair with Geat; Theoderic, who ruled the stronghold of the Mærings for thirty years; and Eormanric, who bullied his subjects, the Goths, so much that they wished him gone. Indeed, the allusions are such that if we did not possess information from other sources, we would not know what these lines refer to. Fortunately, Weland's story is familiar to us from, among others, two Scandinavian sources, the *Vǫlundarkviða* and *Þiðriks Saga*. They tell us that Weland was taken captive by Nithhad and hamstrung. In revenge, he killed the king's two sons and raped his daughter Beadohild, who as a result became mother of the legendary hero Widia. In *Waldere*, this hero is identified as 'Niðhades mæg, / Welandes bearn' (II.8–9; Nithhad's kinsman, Weland's son';). We have already met Eormanric, one of the mightiest of the Gothic kings, who generously rewarded Widsith for escorting his bride all the way from east of Angeln. In *Deor* we are introduced to Eormanric's other, 'wolfish' side. From semi-historic sources, such as the sixth-century *De origine actibusque Getarum* by Jordanes, or from the several centuries' younger Icelandic *Hamdismál*, a poem included in the Elder Edda, Eormanric emerges as a cruel tyrant who did not even refrain from having his beautiful wife Swanhild quartered by horses. However, which of the various Theoderics, whether Gothic or Frankish, is being alluded to, or who Mæthhild and Geat might be, we do not know. Presumably, the audience did; if not, the refrain which ends

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47 Spiegel, '*Tabernacula* of Gregory the Great'; cf. Bede, *De temporum ratione*, xv.41–3 (see note 34 above): '*Blodmonath* mensis immolationum quod in eo pecora quae occisuri erant diis suis voverent. Gratias tibi, bone Iesu, qui nos ab his vanis avertens tibi sacrificia laudis offerre donasti' [*Blodmonath* is the month of sacrifices for then the cattle which were to be slaughtered were consecrated to the gods. Thanks be to you, good Jesus, who have turned us away from these vanities and have given us to offer to you the sacrifice of praise].

each stanza and finally the poem itself would have lost much of its poignancy: 'Ðæs ofereode ðisses swa mæg' [As for that, it went by, so may this]. Following these five stanzas the poet starts meditating upon the vicissitudes of life, especially his seemingly endless share of miseries. His one comfort, however, is that 'the knowing Lord' is in control of everything; He (and not blind fate, we may conclude) distributes honour and misery. With this consolation, the narrator turns to his own (legendary?) situation: we learn that his name is Deor and that he lost his position of favourite court singer when his lord preferred Heorrenda – indeed, a legendary singer whom we know from German and Scandinavian sources[48] – and transferred Deor's title to land (*londryht*) to the singer of the Heodings.

Fortunately, we need not always turn to non-Anglo-Saxon sources for additional information. Weland is a point in case, for he appears to have been quite well known in England. In his Old English translation of Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae*, Alfred substituted 'the very famous ['mærost'] and wise goldsmith Weland' for the Roman general Fabricius, a translation that will have been triggered by a desire to replace the unknown Roman war leader with a more familiar figure and facilitated by the translator's association of the general's name with the Latin word *faber* 'smith'. Weland's fame as a smith resounds in heroic poetry: Beowulf claims his corslet is Weland's work (444–5), while Waldere does the same for his sword Miming (*Waldere*, 1.2–4). In popular memory, his name lived on in a place in Oxfordshire called 'Weland's Smithy', as recorded in a charter of 955, indicating what appears in modern times to be a long barrow. Also in visual art, Weland was awarded a lasting place, for he has been identified on the front panel of the Franks Casket. This small box (*c.* 23 × 19 × 13 cm), probably intended as a reliquary, was artfully made of carved whalebone ivory; on account of linguistic evidence it is located in Northumbria and dated to the early eighth century, much earlier therefore than the manuscript evidence. All sides of the box, apart from the bottom, carry scenes from Roman, Germanic and biblical history or legends, while texts written preponderantly in runic script, but occasionally also in roman, guide the reader to identify the scenes and the material of which the box was crafted. On the left-hand side of the front panel, then, we see a crippled Weland in front of an anvil with in his left hand a pair of tongs and in the other hand a cup which he offers to a man, King Nithhad. The king reaches out to accept the gift but ironically does not realize that the cup was made of the skull of his son,

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48 Hill (ed.), *Old English Minor Poems*, p. 111.

whose headless body is lying at the foot of the anvil. Flanking the king is a woman, Beaduhild, still ignorant of Weland's intention to rape her. On the right-hand side of the panel, we see three men, identified in runic script as 'Magi', adoring the infant Christ and offering their gifts. According to Richard Abels, the juxtaposition of these two scenes – one Christian, one Germanic – graphically brings home the difference between a good ruler (Christ) and a bad one (Nithhad), the one being offered gifts by the Magi which is returned by the much bigger gift of salvation, the other receiving Weland's gift of revenge in return for his having 'gifted' Weland with mutilation.[49] In its entirety, the Franks Casket is a supreme example of how Mediterranean, Christian and Germanic culture had started to interact and co-operate only a century after the arrival of the Christian missionaries.

Foreign heroes?

Widsith and *Deor* provide us with windows on the Germanic world, not so much for the intrinsic value thereof, as for the benefit of the *scops* who are given to perform these poems. For Widsith, his vast knowledge of Germanic heroes, kings and people served as a commercial, while Deor used the lessons of weary times in the heroic past as a consolation for his own present misery. Things are different with *Beowulf*, *Waldere* and the *Finnsburh Fragment*, three poems (of which the last two survive only deficiently) that develop a full narrative centring around the heroic life. However, what these three have in common with *Widsith* and *Deor* is that none of them is situated in England nor even features an Anglo-Saxon.

   Waldere belongs to an international complex of narratives for which it is one of the earliest witnesses. The protagonist is the legendary fifth-century Walter of Aquitaine, the son of the Visigoth King Alphere (Englished as 'Ælfhere' in *Waldere*), who lives as a hostage at the court of Attila the Hun ('Ætla'). The fullest account of the story is the Latin poem *Waltharius*, written on the continent around 900. According to this source, Waldere, together with another hostage, Hiltgunt, daughter of the Burgundian King Hereric, escapes with two trunks of treasure. On their flight they are intercepted in a mountainous landscape by Gunther ('Guðhere'), king of the Burgundians, and his kinsman and champion Hagano ('Hagena'). Strategically positioned in a gorge, Walter valiantly defends himself and Hiltgunt, killing eleven men, but finally reconciles himself with Gunther and Hagano – all three of them

49 Abels, 'What Has Weland to Do with Christ?'

severely mutilated in the fight. The *Waltharius* romantically ends with the wedding of Walter and Hiltgunt.

The Old English textual fragments of *Waldere* relate to the final and decisive clash between Waldere and Hagena. The first of the two extant manuscript leaves contains an address, presumably delivered by Hildegyth (as she would have been called in English, but her name is not mentioned in *Waldere*), exhorting Waldere in his predicament to face the ultimate choice posed to him: 'lif forleosan oððe l[an]gne dom / agan mid eldum' [1.10–11; either to lose your life or to possess lasting reputation among men]. She also confronts Hagena with a choice, albeit indirectly by using the third person and in a mirrored form: 'nu sceal beaga leas / hworfan from ðisse hilde . . . oððe her ær swefan' [1.29–31; now he must either leave from this fight without rings [as a loser] or rather die here]. For Waldere, the choice is glorious: if he dies in battle, it will be with honour, if he wins, his name will forever be praised. The outcome which Hildegyth foresees for Hagena, however, is shameful: either he must return home empty-handed or suffer defeat. This dilemma of 'to live or to die' is a motif which *Waldere* shares not only with its Latin counterpart *Waltharius*, but also with other representatives of Anglo-Saxon heroic discourse. We find it three times in *Beowulf*, on each occasion pronounced by Beowulf himself, and twice in *The Battle of Maldon*; it is also found in narrative prose in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: upon King Alfred's death in 899, his son Edward succeeds him to the throne, but Edward's position is seriously challenged by his cousin Athelwold who has rallied a band of followers. When the rebels are pursued by Edward, they barricade themselves in a building, and Athelwold taunts alliteratively that his firm intention was 'oððe þær libban oððe þær licgan' [either to live there or to lie (i.e., die) there].[50] That Athelwold does not live up to his declaration, but cowardly sneaks away under the cover of darkness, implicitly reveals that men of his mettle are not fit for the leadership of Wessex.

It is remarkable that *Waldere*, consisting altogether of two disjunctive portions of thirty lines, contains so many explicit references to the broader Germanic heroic narrative traditions. Weland the Smith, who has already been referred to above, is mentioned in fragment one as the forger of 'Mimming', a sword that is also known from Middle Dutch, Middle High German and Old Norse sources, while in fragment two the poet shows his familiarity with Weland as the father of the hero Widia, who is also identified

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50 Schwab, 'Nochmals', pp. 352–6. The reference to the Chronicle is mine, not Schwab's; for which, see Bately (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, s.a.* 900.

in one breath as Nithhad's 'mæg' [kinsman]. In fact, Widia was Nithhad's grandson, born as a result of Weland's rape of Nithhad's daughter Beaduhild, as also alluded to in *Deor*. Finally, Theoderic the Ostrogoth, who himself has no role to play in the actual story of Waldere, is brought up in relation to Widia. Again, from continental and Scandinavian sources we know that Theoderic and Widia experienced adventures together. Such allusions, then, to characters who figure prominently in the Germanic narrative repertoire are indicative of the poet's expectation that they will have been no aliens to the audience; on the contrary, fragmented as the poem is, they position *Waldere* firmly within a network of tales that stretches out far into Germania and Scandinavia.

Like *Waldere*, the *Finnsburh Fragment* has come down to us incomplete. This time the fragment consists of only one leaf, or rather consisted of one leaf, because we owe its survival to George Hickes, who copied its contents and published them in his ambitious survey of the Germanic languages and their literatures, *Linguarum Veterum Septentrionalium Thesaurus*, in 1705. Since then, the leaf has not turned up again. It would have been difficult for us to allocate the contents of the *Finnsburh Fragment*, were it not for the fact that the event it relates can be closely linked with the Finnsburh Episode in *Beowulf*. There, in well-nigh 100 lines (1063–1159) – the longest digression in the poem – we are given a much fuller (but still very condensed) account of an expedition made by the Danish warrior Hnæf with a band of retainers to Finn, king of the Frisians, and his wife Hildeburh, Hnæf's sister. Probably, Hildeburh had been given away in marriage in an attempt to secure peace after battle between the Frisians and the Danes. Somehow, the old feud is revived and the Frisians attack the Danish visitors in Finn's hall. This attack is recounted in the *Fragment*. Despite heavy fighting, in which Hnæf as well as Hildeburh's son fall, neither party wins and they agree upon a truce before the winter commences. However, with the return of spring, Hnæf's successor Hengist resumes fighting, and this time the Danes are victorious. Finn and many Frisians are killed, Finn's hall is plundered and burnt down and Hildeburh, along with the booty, is taken home in triumph.[51]

As with the other poems discussed so far, the action is situated once more outside England, this time in Denmark and Frisia. Whereas the Finnsburh Episode is woven into the much larger narrative fabric of *Beowulf*, the *Fragment* for all we can tell must have been much shorter than *Beowulf*, perhaps no more

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51 For an excellent survey of the research history of the Finnsburh matter, see Gwara, 'Foreign *Beowulf*'.

than 300 lines. The poet of the *Fragment*, it seems, was as interested in intentions as he was in action. Speech interchanges with violent encounter, but even after five days of fighting, no casualties have fallen on the Danish side. Twice in the *Fragment* reference is made to the beasts that customarily feast on the corpses of the slain, a theme that has become known as the 'Beasts of Battle'. First, an unnamed warrior declares that 'fugelas singað, / gylleð græghama' [5–6; birds are singing, the grey-coated one [i.e., wolf] is howling]; furthermore, while the fight is in progress, 'hræfen wandrode / sweart and sealobrun' [34–5; the raven was circling, black and with a dusky gleam]. The 'Beasts of Battle' theme, which includes up to three carrion eaters – the wolf, the raven and the eagle – was one of the earliest to be recognized when the theory of an oral-formulaic technique of poetic composition, as developed by Milman Parry and Albert C. Lord, was beginning to be applied to Old English poetry to demonstrate its underlying orality.[52] Usually, it was discovered, the presence of one or more of these three beasts in a narrative announces an upcoming fight, or, alternatively, it concludes a clash of arms. Soon, it was established that the theme enriched battle scenes in *Beowulf*, *Elene*, *Judith*, *Exodus*, *Genesis A*, *The Battle of Brunanburh*, *The Battle of Maldon*, and, as we have seen, the *Finnsburh Fragment*. Not only, therefore, does the theme closely link Old English heroic (or heroic-influenced) poems, it also reaches out to Scandinavian and continental Germanic heroic (or heroic-influenced) poetry. That the northern literature was 'thickly populated by eagles, wolves, and ravens' had long been established, but their presence in continental poetry has until recently escaped the eyes of the critics. Nonetheless, also in the early Middle High German *Annolied*, for example, corpses are left as carrion for the howling 'grey forest-hounds', as Joseph Harris has pointed out.[53] In other words, the theme made up one of the many components in the Anglo-Saxon oral poet's 'toolkit' that was brought along when the Germanic tribes invaded Britain.

The alliterative mode and oral features of Old English poetry will have been part of the invaders' cultural traditions, but can the same be assumed for the narrative subject matter that has been discussed so far? As a matter of fact, we do not know from where the singers obtained the stories that they reworked into song, but Anglo-Saxon England did not exist in a cultural vacuum. Such a statement, though, is much easier to demonstrate with material artefacts than with the much more elusive substance of narrative art. In addition, material

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52 Magoun, 'Theme of the Beasts of Battle'.
53 J. Harris, 'Beasts of Battle'.

objects can be dated with far more precision than the bulk of Old English poetry. Two major archaeological monuments may serve to exemplify what I mean. The lavish treasure discovered at Sutton Hoo in 1939 included armour from Sweden, coins from all over Merovingian Francia, two silver spoons and a dish from Byzantium, and a Coptic bowl from Egypt. The princely burial chamber that came to light in Prittlewell in 2003, if much more modest than Sutton Hoo, nevertheless contained a flagon and bowl from the eastern Mediterranean area, a folding stool of Italian origin, gold-foil crosses probably from Lombardy or Bavaria, and a Byzantine silver spoon. Both Sutton Hoo and Prittlewell also contained locally produced items, including jewellery, various wooden vessels, and, conspicuously, in each a lyre. Their presence bears witness to the many and diverse contacts that the early Anglo-Saxons entertained with the continent and it will have been through similar channels that the narratives of Germanic heroes reached England.

Missionaries and cultural traffic

We know of no heroic stories that were brought from England to the Frisians, Saxons, Bavarians and other tribes on the continent, but so much the more of the *god spell* that was spread there by hundreds of Anglo-Saxon monks and nuns from the late seventh century onwards. In this project, however, vernacular orality had to make room for Latinate literacy: the volatile word was heavily supported by the tangible book. About 100 manuscripts produced in England in the eighth century but preserved in continental libraries – a fraction of what once must have been there – bespeak the nature of the cultural transfer that was involved.[54] We are indebted for some of the earliest English text specimens to continental scribes who duly copied material from their Anglo-Saxon exemplars without perhaps knowing what they were copying. A case in point is the *Épinal Glossary*, produced in Southumbria by the end of the seventh century, but now in Épinal (France). The same Latin–Old English glossary, known as the *Erfurt Glossary*, was copied independently from another Anglo-Saxon manuscript, now lost, in Cologne in the first half of the ninth century.[55] Less fortuitous is the preservation of the Leiden Riddle, an eighth-century Northumbrian version of Riddle 35 in the Exeter Book, because it was copied in northern France in the tenth century by a non-native

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54 The classic study is still Levison, *England and the Continent*; for a case study, see Bremmer, Jr, 'Anglo-Saxon Continental Mission'.
55 Bischoff *et al.* (eds.), *The Épinal, Erfurt, Werden, and Corpus Glossaries*, pp. 17–18.

scribe at the back of the last leaf of a slim manuscript with a collection of Aldhelm's riddles, including the riddle's Latin source, Aldhelm's Enigma 33.[56] Similarly, the earliest version of *Bede's Death Song* owes its survival to having been copied in the monastery of St Gall (Switzerland) in the ninth century.[57]

The Saxons were familiar with the pre-Christian poetic tradition. This is evidenced by the *Hildebrandslied*, a one-leaf fragment that is written in Old Bavarian with an admixture of Saxon. The lay captures the moment when, on opposing sides on the battlefield, Hildebrand faces his son Hadubrand, who fails to recognize his father even after his father has revealed his identity.[58] Hildebrand and Hadubrand are not met with in Anglo-Saxon narratives, but the names of two leaders mentioned in the poem, 'Theotrich' and 'Otacher', are encountered as 'Þeodric' and 'Eadwacer' in Old English verse. Whether Anglo-Saxon missionaries inspired the Saxons to apply their poetic heritage to the composition of Christian epic poetry is still a matter of debate.[59] This much is certain though: there was an unusual interest in England in their distant cousins' poetry. The monumental *Heliand*, recounting in some 6000 alliterative lines the life of Christ in epic mode,[60] was copied around 900 in England in what is now British Library, Cotton Calligula A. vii. Further evidence of Anglo-Saxon appreciation of Old Saxon biblical poetry is provided by the Old English *Genesis*. At some point during its passage through time, probably around 900, someone translated and inserted into its account of the Fall a lengthy portion of the Old Saxon *Genesis*.[61] Its inscription into the Anglo-Saxon repertoire marks a conspicuous moment in the history of English literature. The narrative matter was still shipped across the North Sea, but with a significant difference: no longer was it stored in the memory of oral singers to be digested and performed spontaneously before an appreciative lordly audience; this time it was entrusted to vellum to be decoded and conveyed within the confines of a monk's cell onto the leaves of another manuscript. It was a wind of change that had blown the ship to England.

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56 Parkes, 'Manuscript of the Leiden Riddle'. The manuscript is Leiden, Universiteits-bibliotheek, MS Voss. Lat. Q. 106.
57 A. H. Smith (ed.), *Three Northumbrian Poems*, p. 4.
58 B. Murdoch, 'Old High German', pp. 237–9.
59 Zanni, *Heliand, Genesis und das Altenglische*.
60 For an analysis of the style, which also bears on Old English biblical epic, see Matzner, 'Christianizing the Epic'.
61 See, with further literature, Doane, 'Transmission of *Genesis B*'. For further possible Saxon influence elsewhere, see Bredehoft, 'Old Saxon Influence'.

Chapter 8

English literature in the ninth century

SUSAN IRVINE

To a scholar working at the turn of the ninth century, the idea of composing vernacular prose works as part of a centrally planned learning programme would surely have seemed inconceivable. Seen in that context, the cultural transformation which made the large-scale production of literature in English an established tradition by the end of the century was truly remarkable. Over this period of time the linguistic boundaries defining the use of Latin and the vernacular were renegotiated, and English became accepted as a legitimate language for literary composition. It was the court of Alfred the Great which acted as the pivot for this cultural shift, with the king himself promoting and authorizing the practice of vernacular translation. But the literary and linguistic developments of the years before 871, nationally and internationally, were also highly significant in shaping the reinvigorated activity during Alfred's reign. Moreover the 'ninth century', from a literary perspective, should not be seen as ending abruptly in 899: this is a notional construct which has emerged from the convenience of the date of Alfred's death. The literary output traditionally associated with Alfred's reign may perhaps be more usefully considered in terms of a 'long ninth century' extending beyond 900.

This chapter will trace the ways in which confidence in English developed and was manifested in the ninth century. It will argue that a combination of political, intellectual and spiritual imperatives, both within England and from the continent, underlay the emergence of a vernacular literary culture. It will examine the role of King Alfred and the West Saxon court in promoting ideas of translation and interpretation. The range and inventiveness of both the translations and original compositions will be explored. The strategies employed to invest these works with a validity which both reflects and is also distinct from that of Latin writings will be considered with particular attention to the idea of the king as author-translator.

Latin learning in the ninth century and the rise of English

The emergence of a large body of vernacular literature in the late ninth century marks an extraordinary shift from its earlier decades, in terms of both productivity and linguistic usage. Latin undoubtedly remained the dominant literary language of Anglo-Saxon England for much of the ninth century, in so far as literary production can be identified as happening at all. The first quarter or so saw some continuation of literary activity from the late eighth century (in the production mainly of biblical/liturgical books, but also of various patristic texts and classbooks), though it could hardly be described as flourishing. Michael Lapidge, assessing Latin learning in ninth-century England, finds a 'surprisingly small figure of thirty-one manuscripts which were written or owned in England before *c*. 825 and then preserved here during the ninth century'.[1] Mercia, politically dominant in the first two decades or so of the century, may have been relatively active in manuscript production, as the group of so-called 'Tiberius' manuscripts, made probably at Lichfield and Worcester, would seem to attest.[2] English scriptorial creativity too can be observed in the early ninth century: David Dumville notes that 'all the calligraphic grades of Insular minuscule saw new development in the first third of the century'.[3]

By the middle period of the century, however, a drastic decline in learning seems to have set in. Book production came virtually to a standstill: only three manuscripts were demonstrably written in England during the period 835–85.[4] The decline can be attributed to various factors. In large part the Viking attacks may be to blame: the deterioration in quality of script and in grammar at Canterbury in the 850s and 860s can be linked specifically to the impact of the Vikings, as Nicholas Brooks has shown.[5] The lax standards which seem to have prevailed among bishops and other ecclesiastics in this period may also have played a significant role.[6] Not until the 880s does learning in Anglo-Saxon England undergo a revival, with the use of the vernacular as its core: the ensuing literary activity would result in the production of some of the most intellectually ambitious works written in Old English.

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1 Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899*, p. 411.
2 M. Brown, 'Mercian Supremacy', pp. 195–9.
3 Dumville, 'Ninth Century', p. 119.
4 Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899*, p. 416. See also Gneuss, 'King Alfred'.
5 Brooks, 'England in the Ninth Century', p. 15.
6 Dumville, 'King Alfred and the Tenth-Century Reform' in his *Wessex and England*.

The decline of learning in Latin over the decades leading up to Alfred's accession in itself may have opened the way for the promotion of the vernacular. Alongside this decline, an increasing dependence on written English seems to have emerged. This dependence seems in turn to have coincided with changing attitudes to the appropriate use of the vernacular, both within Anglo-Saxon England and on the continent.

Vernacular literacy in Anglo-Saxon England is evident in its usage from at least the beginning of the ninth century onwards in a variety of documents including wills, leases and charters.[7] As Susan Kelly notes, it had the advantages of being more convenient and accurate, of being able to record a verbal statement and of being accessible to a wider public.[8] Simon Keynes identifies a distinctive West Saxon tradition of 'pragmatic' literacy in both Latin and the vernacular from the 830s to the 870s.[9] Vernacular documents were clearly used widely for utilitarian purposes in Anglo-Saxon England before Alfred's reign, perhaps particularly in Wessex.

A rather different tradition of written vernacular usage may also be relevant, that of the production of manuscripts of vernacular poetry. The West Saxon household may well have been a context for compiling or composing vernacular poetic texts.[10] The contemporary biography of Alfred written (in Latin) by Asser, a Welsh monk whom Alfred summoned to work with him, seems to indicate the availability of books of poetry. According to Asser, Alfred's own scholarly potential was revealed through his ability to learn a book of English poetry given to him by his mother.[11] Asser's observation elsewhere that Alfred's children were reading 'utriusque linguae libri, Latinae scilicet et Saxonicae' [books in both languages, that is, Latin and Old English] may arguably refer to a similar tradition, though it is equally possible that prose works are alluded to here.[12] We cannot be sure what poetry Alfred and his contemporaries knew, and indeed how much of it was available to them in written rather than oral form.[13] Cynewulf's poetry, often tentatively assigned to the late eighth or ninth century, is now, at least in the case of *The Fates of the Apostles*, more certainly assigned to the tenth century.[14] The mention by the translator of the Old English Bede (independently of Bede

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7 S. Kelly, 'Anglo-Saxon Lay Society'.
8 *Ibid.*, pp. 56–7.
9 Keynes, 'Power of the Written Word', pp. 185–90.
10 Pratt, *Political Thought*, p. 90.
11 Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ed. Stevenson, p. 20 (chap. 23).
12 *Ibid.*, p. 58 (chap. 75).
13 On the shift from orality to literacy in the Anglo-Saxon period, see O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*.
14 Conner, 'On Dating Cynewulf'.

himself) that Cædmon's poems had been written down by his teachers cannot necessarily be interpreted as more than an attempt to authenticate the English version of the Hymn.[15] The value of vernacular poetry is, however, clearly acknowledged by Asser's story. From this, as well as from the late ninth-century use of techniques from native poetic traditions which are discussed below, emerges important evidence of poetic activity which is otherwise more fully witnessed only in the tenth century.

A more important factor, perhaps, in the rise of the vernacular in ninth-century England is the increasingly close association which developed between Wessex and Mercia.[16] Evidence suggests that at the time Alfred succeeded to the West Saxon kingdom, Mercian learning was held in some awe by the West Saxons. As Mechthild Gretsch points out, the prose preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care* implies that 'Mercia (south of the Humber but north of the Thames) was the only place where Alfred had encountered some Latin learning and expertise in rendering Latin texts into the vernacular'.[17] The glossing of the Vespasian Psalter, an early or mid-ninth-century vernacular gloss in a Mercian dialect, may exemplify the learning for which the Mercians were renowned; a consistent gloss of this kind, moreover, may well have acted as a stepping-stone to vernacular translation. As Robert Stanton notes, a number of the translations of the late ninth century were apparently influenced by a 'glossemic' tendency.[18] The influence of Mercian scholars at the West Saxon court is seen in the role several played in assisting Alfred to acquire learning: Asser mentions four specifically (Wærferth, bishop of Worcester *c.* 872–915, Plegmund, archbishop of Canterbury 890–923, and Æthelstan and Werwulf, both priests and chaplains),[19] and others may have included a Mercian charter-writer and the Mercian responsible for the four-word inscription on the Alfred Jewel.[20]

It is also possible, though by no means certain, that prose works in the vernacular were produced in Mercia, or at least by Mercians, before Alfred's reign. Dating is problematic with the so-called early literary Mercian texts: Janet Bately has shown that only a small number of them can be safely assigned to the ninth rather than tenth century.[21] Two of these works, the

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15 Miller (ed. and trans.), *Old English Bede*, vol. I, p. 346, lines 4–5.
16 See further Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians'.
17 Gretsch, 'Junius Psalter Gloss', p. 104. The prose preface to the OE *Pastoral Care* is discussed further below.
18 Stanton, *Culture of Translation*, p. 58.
19 Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ed. Stevenson, p. 62 (chap. 77).
20 Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', p. 40.
21 Bately, 'Old English Prose', pp. 103–4.

Old English *Martyrology* and the Old English Bede, may have had Mercian authors,[22] but in neither case can a pre-Alfredian date be assumed: the *Martyrology*, as Bately notes, may have been composed any time between the middle and very end of the ninth century, and the lack of proof for the Old English Bede being written at the king's request means that neither a pre-Alfredian date nor composition shortly after 900 can be ruled out.[23] The Old English *Dialogues*, composed by Bishop Wærferth of Worcester apparently at Alfred's instigation, offers more definitive evidence of a Mercian reputation for learning in the late ninth century. Asser (somewhat indiscriminately perhaps) decreed that the work was translated 'elucabratim et elegantissime' [intelligently and in a very polished style];[24] it is not inconceivable that the success of this work acted as a catalyst for the idea of a broader programme of translating important works into the vernacular.

Other precedents, within and outside England, for the translation of religious works into the vernacular may have been influential. Bede, writing in Northumbria in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, condoned the use of English translations of the Apostles' Creed and Lord's Prayer where required by the ignorant, and was himself apparently working at his death on translations into English of selections from Isidore's *De natura rerum* and the opening chapters of St John's Gospel (the former for his pupils and the latter for use in church).[25] Further afield, the Irish had a tradition of glossing and translating Latin religious texts (particularly the psalter and gospel) into the vernacular.[26]

The continent also offered an important precedent. The Carolingian empire seems to have engaged in translating literature into the vernacular, albeit on a relatively small scale. Unlike in England, there seems not to have been a tradition on the continent of producing documents such as charters and wills in the vernacular,[27] and in the West Frankish kingdoms there is no trace either of any attempt to promote a reading knowledge of the vernacular.[28] In

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22 According to Rauer, 'Sources' (*ASE*), p. 93 and note 18, the work's compiler is 'most probably writing in an Anglian dialect', though it was not necessarily 'written specifically by a Mercian or in Mercia'.

23 Bately, 'Old English Prose', pp. 103–4. See also Rowley, 'Bede in Later Anglo-Saxon England', p. 221, and *Old English Version*.

24 Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ed. Stevenson, p. 62 (chap. 77).

25 'Epistola Bede ad Ecgbertum Episcopum' [Bede's Letter to Ecgbert], in Bede, *Opera historica*, pp. 405–23 (p. 409), and 'Epistola de obitu Bedae' [(Cuthbert's) Letter on the Death of Bede], in *HE*, pp. 580–7 (p. 582).

26 Stanton, *Culture of Translation*, p. 56; G. H. Brown, 'Dynamics of Literacy', p. 119.

27 J. L. Nelson, 'Literacy in Carolingian Government', pp. 9–10.

28 McKitterick, *Carolingians and the Written Word*, p. 20.

the East Frankish kingdoms, however, there does seem to have been a concerted initiative under Louis the German and Archbishop Hrabanus to translate Scripture and other religious texts into the Germanic vernacular.[29] Although no direct influence has been traced, the kinds of justification that are offered for such vernacular renderings bear a striking similarity to Alfred's own, as Malcolm Godden has recently shown.[30] The close connections between Alfred's court and the continent, including the presence within the court of such foreign scholars as Grimbald of St-Bertin and Reims and John the Old Saxon, undoubtedly encouraged the kind of exchange of ideas that this parallel might represent.[31]

Vernacular translation and the prose preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care*

In the rightly famous prose preface which Alfred attached to his translation of Gregory's *Cura pastoralis*, composed in the 880s, the king sets out a scheme to redress the parlous lack of learning which he saw as prevailing in Anglo-Saxon England. Alfred proposes a centrally co-ordinated programme of translation of Latin works ('sumæ bec, ða ðe niedbeðearfosta sien eallum monnum to wiotonne' [certain books which are most necessary for all people to know]) into English, 'ðæt geðiode . . . ðe we ealle gecnawan mægen' [the language which we can all understand].[32] Alfred undoubtedly aimed to disseminate learning though the use of translation, but the cultural resonances of his programme extend well beyond this pragmatic purpose.

The prose preface to the *Pastoral Care* articulates a shift of perspective on the status and function of the English vernacular in late ninth-century England. As a written text in the vernacular, moreover, it self-consciously reflects its own message. Importantly it draws on rhetorical techniques not only from Latin – indeed its structure may be based on that of the early papal epistle – but also from Old English poetic traditions, such as repetition and wordplay.[33] The word 'wisdom', for example, reverberates through the preface, alliterating provocatively with 'wige' [war] and 'welan' [wealth].[34] It also alliterates with

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29 Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire*, pp. 179–85.
30 Godden, 'Prologues and Epilogues'.
31 On connections between Alfred and the continent, see, e.g., J. L. Nelson, *Rulers and Ruling Families*, esp. items I, II, IV and VI. On Grimbald and John the Old Saxon, see Asser, *Alfred the Great*, ed. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 26–7.
32 Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, vol. I, p. 7.
33 See Huppé, 'Alfred and Ælfric'.
34 See Shippey, 'Wealth and Wisdom'.

another word used insistently in the second half of the preface, 'wendan' [to translate]. The loss of both wealth and wisdom is to be countered by making learning available through translation, just as 'wise wealhstodas' [wise trans-lators] in the past 'wendon' [translated] books 'on hiora agen geðiode' [into their own language].[35]

Alfred invokes the precedent of past translation in relation to method and theory as well, further enhancing the status of his own translation programme. In describing his method of translation as 'hwilum word be worde, hwilum andgiet of andgiete' [sometimes word for word, sometimes sense for sense], he draws on a formula familiar from Jerome and Gregory.[36] He also draws on the tradition of translation as learned interpretation, articulated by authors such as Augustine and Isidore.[37] This interpretive function of the translator is described by Alfred in the preface: 'Siððan ic hie ða geliornod hæfde, swæ swæ ic hie forstod, ond swæ ic hie andgitfullicost areccean meahte, ic hie on Englisc awende' [After I had learned it, just as I understood it and could most intelligibly interpret it, I translated it into English].[38] Translation is dependent on 'learning', itself a process of understanding and interpreting.

The preface makes clear that the vernacular translation programme is to be a means of reviving Christian learning in Anglo-Saxon England, at the same time as conveying that such learning is an integral element in the success and prestige of a nation. The vernacular translations, it is implied, offer a path to cultural, spiritual and political recovery. Through the vernacular translations the learning of Latin books will not only be transferred but also transformed. Translation inevitably acts both to appropriate a ready-made culture and to recreate it as something different. As Robert Stanton writes, 'The tendencies of translation to preserve and replicate on the one hand, and subvert and displace on the other, show up clearly in both the theory and practice of translation in Alfred's day.'[39] Vernacular translation not only enabled English to develop its own status as a literary language, but also, in the words of Kathleen Davis, 'itself marks the emergence of the English people as a Christian political community'.[40]

Alfred's own role in this development was crucial. His authority as king is used to secure authority for the project. He is presented as fully implicated in the project through his own role as translator and interpreter. His political and literary roles are integrally bound up with each other: as Davis writes,

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35 Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, vol. i, p. 7.
36 Stanton, *Culture of Translation*, p. 82.
37 K. Davis, 'Performance of Translation Theory', pp. 156–8.
38 Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, vol. i, p. 7.
39 Stanton, *Culture of Translation*, p. 6.
40 K. Davis, 'Performance of Translation Theory', p. 150.

'Alfred's role as a translator is also a negotiation of his role as a spiritual and secular leader.'[41] Alfred no doubt had in mind the model of rulership which combined authority and textual learning, for which both David and Charlemagne acted as important precedents.[42] The importance of continental precedents for Alfred's sponsorship of book production and scholarship has been rightly emphasized.[43] But Alfred also has in mind past kings 'giond Angelcynn' [throughout England] who 'Gode ond his ærendwrecum hersumedon' [obeyed God and his messengers], 'ægðer ge hiora sibbe ge hiora siodo ge hiora onweald innanbordes gehioldon, ond eac ut hiora eðel gerymdon' [maintained their peace, morality and authority at home and also extended their territory abroad], and 'him ða speow ægðer ge mid wige ge mid wisdome' [succeeded both in war and in wisdom].[44] As the preface implies here, royal and ecclesiastical interests coincide where the advancement of learning is concerned. In implementing his programme, Alfred could tap into the networks of power and patronage that the West Saxon court offered.[45] 'Ælfred kyning hateð gretan Wærferð biscep' [King Alfred commands Bishop Wærferth to be greeted] – thus reads the formal opening of the preface.[46] Court culture, with its political, spiritual and intellectual aspirations, provided a powerful context for the dissemination of Christian learning.

Although bishops are the addressees of the preface itself, Alfred apparently envisaged a much wider readership – lay and ecclesiastical – for the vernacular works. The programme, he asserts, is designed to ensure that 'eall sio gioguð ðe nu is on Angelcynne friora monna, ðara ðe ða speda hæbben ðæt hie ðæm befeolan mægen, sien to liornunga oðfæste, ða hwile ðe hie to nanre oðerre note ne mægen, oð ðone first ðe hie wel cunnen Englisc gewrit arædan' [all the freeborn young men in England, those who have the means to be able to apply themselves to it, may be set to learning, as long as they are not useful for any other employment, until they can read English writing well].[47] Alfred may have in mind here the pupils of the *schola* within the royal household (including his own children) who are referred to by Asser, and perhaps also secular office-holders.[48] A more restricted audience, however, may be suggested by a second preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care*, this time in verse: copies of the work are to be sent

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41 *Ibid.*, p. 149. See also Lerer, *Literacy and Power*, esp. chap. 2.
42 Stanton, *Culture of Translation*, p. 7.
43 See, e.g., Gameson, 'Alfred the Great'.
44 Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, vol. I, p. 3.
45 On the operation of Alfred's court, see Pratt, *Political Thought*.
46 Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, vol. I, p. 3.
47 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
48 Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ed. Stevenson, p. 58 (chap. 75); Pratt, *Political Thought*, p. 122.

out to the bishops 'forðæm hi his sume ðorfton, / ða ðe Lædenspræce læste cuðon' [because some of them who knew very little Latin needed it].[49] As Godden has suggested, the translation of the *Pastoral Care*, and perhaps other vernacular translations, may have been 'intended for bishops as the primary readers'.[50]

At the end of his prose preface, Alfred sets out his scheme for ensuring efficient distribution of the Old English *Pastoral Care*. A copy is to be sent to each bishopric (accompanied by a valuable 'æstel', probably a book-marker). The book is not to be removed subsequently from the monastery unless it is with the bishop, or away on loan, or being copied. Further details are offered in the verse preface, which describes the process of sending exemplars to scribes 'suð and norð' in order that more copies can be produced for circulation to the bishops.[51] Manuscript evidence would suggest that the system was implemented successfully in the case of the *Pastoral Care*.[52] Other works linked to Alfred's reign, such as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Old English *Laws*, survive in a number of copies or versions which may point to wide dissemination soon after their composition. The survival of a number of works in only one or two later copies (as with the Old English Boethius, *Dialogues* and *Soliloquies*) makes their evidence much more difficult to assess.

Although Alfred is predominantly concerned in the prose preface with the production and circulation of vernacular translations, he does not lose sight of the pre-eminent role Latin would continue to play in his kingdom's intellectual well-being. Vernacular literacy is envisaged, for many at least, as a stepping-stone to education in Latin. Latin remains the medium by which more extensive learning can be achieved: 'lære mon siððan furður on Lædengeðiode ða ðe mon furðor læran wille ond to hieran hade don wille' [afterwards let one teach further in Latin those whom one wishes to teach further and bring to a higher office].[53] Even so, notwithstanding the implicit assumption in the preface that, as David Dumville puts it, 'the vernacular was (and could only be) an inferior and inadequate substitute for Latin',[54] Alfred's programme is remarkable for its forthright promotion of the idea of a bilingual culture, in which English as well as Latin could legitimately and eloquently express Christian learning. The preface itself elegantly

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49 Irvine and Godden (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius*, p. 408.
50 Godden, 'Alfredian Project', p. 105.
51 Irvine and Godden (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius*, p. 408.
52 See Sisam, 'Publication of Alfred's *Pastoral Care*' in his *Studies*.
53 Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, vol. I, p. 7.
54 Dumville, *Wessex and England*, p. 191.

exemplifies the potential of English for such expression, setting up models for stylistic emulation.

The allusion in the *Pastoral Care* prose preface to translating 'certain books most necessary for all men to know' raises the question of exactly which Latin works Alfred had in mind. Gregory's *Cura pastoralis* is the most obvious candidate, since the preface itself was written to accompany the translation of this work. The book lists of Anglo-Saxon libraries may give us further clues: works by the four major patristic authors, Gregory, Isidore, Jerome and Augustine, feature prominently among these.[55] The most important evidence, however, comes from the contemporary vernacular translations themselves. Identifying which of these were associated with Alfred's programme is not always straightforward, given the uncertain or ambiguous evidence for their dates of composition: very few ninth-century manuscripts of the vernacular works survive (the *Pastoral Care* represents a significant exception), and other evidence may be open to conflicting interpretations. The controversy over the date of the enigmatic prose and poetic pieces known as *The Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, whose eponymous interlocutors exchange bizarre riddles and expatiate on such esoteric subjects as the personified form of the Pater Noster, exemplifies how evidence can be variously interpreted. The historical context, language and content may point to a date of composition either in Alfred's reign (as Patrick O'Neill argues) or in Æthelstan's reign (according to Daniel Anlezark).[56] The ambiguity of the evidence means that the question of whether this work belongs to the ninth or tenth century remains unanswered.

Other vernacular literature, both translation and original composition, offers more substantial evidence for ninth-century composition. A central core of works, sometimes termed the 'Alfredian canon', consists of translations which have been linked on linguistic and stylistic grounds to the Old English *Pastoral Care*. These are the renderings of Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae*, Augustine of Hippo's *Soliloquia* and the first fifty Psalms. Even here the evidence is not conclusive: the view that these works were composed by the same person, let alone that this person was King Alfred, has been vigorously contested.[57] Two other works, the translations of Paulus Orosius'

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55 Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*.
56 P. P. O'Neill, 'Date, Provenance and Relationship'; Anlezark (ed. and trans.), *Dialogues*, pp. 49–57.
57 See, recently, Godden, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?', and 'Alfredian Project'; and Bately, 'Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything?'.

Historiarum adversum paganos libri septem and Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, were attributed to Alfred by the twelfth-century historian William of Malmesbury.[58] The former, on linguistic grounds, is now thought to be by a different author, probably writing in Alfred's reign;[59] the latter, as we saw above, cannot even be placed certainly in the ninth century. Wærferth's translation of Gregory the Great's *Dialogi* was commissioned by Alfred, but apparently before he set up his educational programme. Vernacular works other than translations are likely to have been inspired by the Alfredian initiative, including the Old English *Laws* and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Though the latter gives no unequivocal indication of the date or context for its production, the evidence points convincingly to a link with Alfred's court: manuscript and linguistic evidence attest to an original compilation with a date between 890 and 892; Asser's use of a copy of the Chronicle extending to at least 887 suggests that the work was circulated in some form in Alfred's reign; and similar annalistic activity at the Carolingian court might have acted as a model for its production.[60] Less clearly to be identified as part of the Alfredian initiative is the Old English *Martyrology*, which, as we have seen, cannot be assigned more narrowly than to the second half of the ninth century. Similarly, although it can be argued that Alfred's reign is 'a highly plausible context for the compilation' of the medical manual known as Bald's *Leechbook*, a date on either side is also possible.[61]

The vernacular translators followed their Latin sources with varying closeness; the authors of other works, such as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Old English *Martyrology* (which alone seems to be based on up to 200 Latin sources), drew on Latin models and showed familiarity with a range of Latin works.[62] At the same time, the extent to which authors felt empowered to experiment with a range of forms and techniques, and in some cases to challenge and interrogate the literary traditions on which they drew, should not be underestimated in the establishment of English as an assured literary and political medium.

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58 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, vol, I, p. 192 (II.123).
59 Bately (ed.), *Old English Orosius*, pp. lxxiii–lxxxvi.
60 For an overview of the manuscript and linguistic evidence, see S. Irvine, 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'. On the Carolingian parallels, see Scharer, 'Writing of History'.
61 Pratt, 'Illnesses of King Alfred', p. 71. See also Bately, 'Old English Prose', p. 100, note 49.
62 See Rauer, 'Sources' (*Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*); and S. Irvine, 'Sources of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'.

Forms and techniques of ninth-century vernacular literature

The sources most frequently consulted by the vernacular authors are classical and patristic. Their broad range of material – philosophical, hagiographical, liturgical, theological and pastoral – is well represented in the Old English *Boethius*, *Pastoral Care*, *Soliloquies*, *Dialogues* and also the *Martyrology*. Historical sources are used by the authors of the Old English Bede and Orosius, and also informed the entries of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The Bible provides a source for the Old English *Psalms*. The composition of vernacular works also extended into more practical contexts, as the *Laws* and Bald's *Leechbook* attest.

Cutting across these different categories of material is an equally versatile engagement with different forms and techniques of writing, which will be the focus of this section. Authors engaged with a variety of forms: the manual or treatise (Old English *Pastoral Care*); the dialogue (Old English *Boethius*, *Dialogues* and *Soliloquies*); and the historical narrative (Old English Bede and Orosius). Other works, the Old English *Laws*, *Psalms* and *Martyrology* and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, may be loosely defined as collections. Both prose and poetry are used: although the ninth-century vernacular authors predominantly wrote in prose, poetic composition occurs in some prefaces and epilogues and, most notably, the Metres of the Old English Boethius.

The form of the dialogue in particular shows translators engaging with form in a variety of ways. 'If we can say anything at all about King Alfred's taste in literature', writes Godden, 'it is that he loved the dialogue as a form.'[63] The dialogue seems to have offered translators particularly rich opportunities for exploiting in a sophisticated way the interaction between the two speakers, the source author and the translator.

The Old English *Dialogues*, apparently commissioned by Alfred and written by Wærferth, is the earliest of the ninth-century vernacular dialogues. Following its source, Gregory's *Dialogi*, it presents a conversation between Gregory and his deacon Peter, in which Gregory relates a series of miracle stories about various Italian bishops and priests. The difficulty of reconciling secular responsibilities and spiritual contemplation which the work acknowledges at its opening presumably resonated with Alfred: certainly it is echoed in the prose preface accompanying the work, purportedly by Alfred but probably

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63 Godden, 'Player-King', p. 137.

written by Wærferth.[64] Wærferth's aim in the Old English *Dialogues* is to stay as close as possible to his source, and on the whole his translation is a very literal one.[65] Even in his style he imitates the Latin he is translating, retaining the complex Latin sentence structures as far as possible.[66] Wærferth opens his work by setting up a frame which separates it from Gregory's first-person narrative: 'Forþan nu æt ærestan we magon gehyran, hu se eadega ond se apostolica papa sanctus Gregorius spræc to his deacone, þam wæs nama Petrus' [Therefore we can now hear first of all how the blessed and apostolic Pope Gregory spoke to his deacon whose name was Peter].[67] With his use of the plural first-person 'we' here, Wærferth establishes a perspective for himself and his audience which is different from Gregory's. Wærferth also alerts his audience to their retrospective viewpoint in his introductory passages to each of the four books.[68] Elsewhere, however, he shows no interest in developing the relationship between source author and translator, or indeed between Gregory's audience and his own.

In the Old English *Boethius* and *Soliloquies*, probably both composed by the same translator (whether Alfred or Pseudo-Alfred), the dialogue form is used more provocatively. Both works explore the possibilities of the literary dialogue, a form popular from Plato onwards, in highly imaginative ways. The authors Boethius and Augustine are realized not only as specific historical figures but also as fictionalized speakers who belong both to the world of the sources and to late ninth-century intellectual and political culture.[69] In these works multilayered relationships are established between the different voices. Dialogue for the vernacular translator was, in Godden's words, 'a way of capturing an imagined debate between different perspectives and world-pictures'.[70] In both works, in contrast to the Old English *Dialogues*, the translator seems to revel in adapting and reinterpreting his sources, drawing freely on the commentary tradition for the Boethius and introducing a different source altogether (Augustine's *De videndo Deo*) for the third book of the *Soliloquies*. The style in both reflects a confidence in the ability of the vernacular to convey unfamiliar and complex ideas, with a markedly free rendering of Latin constructions throughout.[71]

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64 Hecht (ed.), *Dialoge Gregors*, p. 2. For the attribution to Wærferth, see Godden, 'Wærferth and King Alfred', pp. 38–9.
65 Godden, 'Wærferth and King Alfred', p. 47.
66 Bately, 'Old English Prose', pp. 120–3.
67 Hecht (ed.), *Dialoge Gregors*, p. 2.
68 *Ibid*., pp. 2, 94, 179, 260. See Dekker, 'King Alfred's Translation', pp. 36–40.
69 See further Godden, 'Player-King'.
70 Godden, 'Alfredian Project', p. 110.
71 Bately, 'Old English Prose', pp. 129–30.

In the *Soliloquies* the two speakers in the dialogue are identified in a preface to the work as Augustine's 'gesceadwisnes' and 'mod' [Reason and Mind].[72] Once the dialogue is under way, however, Mind is referred to consistently as 'ic', and this first person is both the historical figure Augustine (as in the source) and a fictional persona of Augustine recreated in a ninth-century mould. The Old English Boethius presents a more complex picture. Its source, *De consolatione philosophiae*, describes an imaginary dialogue between Boethius himself and a figure called 'Philosophia' [Lady Philosophy], through which he is brought from utter despondency to a recognition of the wisdom of God's providence. In the Boethius 'se wisdom' [Wisdom] (sometimes referred to as 'seo gesceadwisness' [Reason]) replaces the figure of 'Philosophia'. The representation of Boethius is more protean. In Books I and II Boethius is mainly referred to as 'þæt mod' [Mind], whereas in Books III–V he is mainly the first-person 'ic' [I].[73] The name 'Boetius', used occasionally in the work to refer to the source author to distinguish him from the speaker called 'ic' or 'mod', is elsewhere sporadically interchangeable with 'ic'/'mod'.[74] The uncertainties of nomenclature draw attention to the uneasy relationship between source and translation. 'Boethius' is both identical to and yet distinct from 'Mind' and 'I'. The speakers both represent those in the source and are also quite transformed. The dialogue is between past and present as well as between two speakers whose words connect with particular historical contexts (the source's and the translation's).[75] The audience can thus engage with the philosophical issues underlying this work from more than one perspective. The vernacular language contributes to this dual vision in both encouraging the identification between speaker and contemporary audience, and yet also emphasizing the gap between the two. The prose translator, with comments such as 'þæt we heretoha hatað' [which we call leader] to define 'consul' and alterations such as the use of 'Weland' for his source's 'Fabricius' (perhaps punning on Latin *faber* [smith or craftsman]), creatively builds these different perspectives into his work.[76]

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72 Alfred, *Soliloquies*, p. 48.

73 The change may reflect a shifting interpretation of 'mod' on the part of the author; for the important role which Augustine's *Soliloquia* may have played in the development of the OE *Boethius*, see Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, pp. 313–25.

74 Godden and Irvine (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius*, vol. I, pp. 245 (B 3.1, 10), 258 (B 10.1), 295 (B 26.19, 23, 31, 33, 36), 298 (B 27.27, 41).

75 Godden, 'Player-King', pp. 138–45.

76 Godden and Irvine (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius*, vol. I, pp. 243 (B 1.11–12), 283 (B 19.17).

In historical narrative, the next form to be discussed here, the vernacular translators, like their Latin sources, recognized the opportunity to highlight how the pattern of historical events could be seen as fulfilling Christian providence. Again the translators responded to their sources in different ways. Of the two works, only the Old English Orosius (composed between 890 and 899) can be linked with the Alfredian programme with any certainty,[77] although the Old English Bede would certainly not be out of place in that context, especially in the light of Alfred's debt to Bede for the invention of a concept of the English.[78] The Bede translator, perhaps (on linguistic evidence) a Mercian scholar, writes in the voice of Bede throughout: 'Ic Beda Cristes þeow and mæssepreost sende gretan ðone leofastan cyning Ceolwulf [I, Bede, servant of Christ and priest, send greetings to the most beloved king Ceolwulf].[79] His work remains close to its source syntactically, resulting in a Latinate style which occasionally becomes unidiomatic because of its closeness to its original.[80] A distinctive feature of his work is his particular emphasis on material relating to the English as opposed to other parts of Britain or beyond.[81] For his selection of material – he reduces by about a quarter the length of his source – he seems to have this principle in mind.

Like the Old English Bede, the Old English Orosius cuts a considerable amount of material from its source (reducing seven books to six), but alterations of a more drastic kind occur in the latter. Although the scope of both source and translation is world history from Adam's creation to the early fifth century, the source, as Bately notes, has been transformed 'from an exercise in polemic using historical material to a survey of world history from a Christian standpoint'.[82] Its translator has deviated freely from his source, not only cutting but also inserting material, most famously the fascinating reports of Ohthere and Wulfstan.[83] Whereas the Bede translator mimics the style of his source, the translator of the Orosius has developed his own style, writing fluently and clearly, showing a preference for paratactic constructions but often resorting to lengthy and complex syntax.[84] The Orosius translator, moreover, draws attention to the gap between himself and the source author: the phrase 'cwæð Orosius', used forty-six times by the translator, acts as an

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77 Bately (ed.), *Old English Orosius*, p. lxxxvi.
78 Foot, 'Making of *Angelcynn*', p. 59.
79 Miller (ed. and trans.), *Old English Bede*, vol. 1, p. 2.
80 Bately, 'Old English Prose', p. 118.
81 Whitelock, 'Old English Bede', p. 62. On Bede's treatment of his source, see also Rowley, 'Bede in Later Anglo-Saxon England', pp. 222–4, and *Old English Version*.
82 Bately (ed.), *Old English Orosius*, p. xciii.
83 *Ibid*., pp. 13–18.
84 *Ibid*., pp. c–cv.

intermittent reminder of the different perspective offered by this work from that of the source.

The form which seems to have most encouraged original vernacular composition in the ninth century was the collection. This form was not itself new: collections of authoritative writings (known as *florilegia*) had long been used for study in schools and monastic libraries.[85] Asser records that Alfred collected psalms and prayers in a book which he wished to be known as his *enchiridion* or 'manualem librum' [handbook].[86] Carolingian influence may have played a significant part: the surviving collections of vernacular material perhaps have their origins in precedents offered by continental collections such as Charles the Bald's martyrology and Frankish annals.[87]

One of the vernacular 'collections' is a translation of an already existing sequence of texts. The Old English *Psalms* offers a vernacular translation into West Saxon prose (similar in language and style to other works attributed to Alfred) of the first fifty psalms,[88] in keeping with the (perhaps Irish-influenced) traditional division of the Psalter into three sections of fifty in Ango-Saxon England.[89] Each psalm (except the first) is preceded by an introduction, written by the translator and offering a fourfold scheme of interpretation, indicative again of Irish influence.[90] Stylistic similarities with the glossing tradition have been noted: such features might alert readers to a close engagement with the source, at the same time as the translation as a whole innovatively explores the relationship between the roles of the translator and David.[91] The integrity of the vernacular translation in source and thematic approach belies its structure as a collection.

Other vernacular collections may perhaps represent original compilation. The Old English *Martyrology*, a collection of over 200 commemorative entries, seems to have been compiled cumulatively, beginning with a register of feast days, saints' names and liturgical occasions which was then filled out with appropriate narrative detail as it became available.[92] The author's interest is apparently more in conveying information, often of an eclectic kind, than in stylistic elegance: 'in spite of its dependence on Latin source material', notes Janet Bately, 'its style is not much more sophisticated than that of the earlier

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85 Stanton, *Culture of Translation*, p. 88.
86 Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ed. Stevenson, p. 75 (chap. 89).
87 Rauer, 'Sources' (*ASE*), p. 99; Asser, *Alfred the Great*, ed. Keynes and Lapidge, p. 40.
88 Alfred, *Psalms*; see also Bately, 'Lexical Evidence'.
89 Pratt, *Political Thought*, p. 246.
90 Alfred, *Psalms*, p. 24.
91 Stanton, *Culture of Translation*, pp. 121–9.
92 Rauer, 'Sources' (*ASE*), p. 90. For a view that the work may be a translation of a now lost Latin martyrology, see Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 46–8.

entries in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle or the laws of Ine'.[93] The Old English *Laws* draws attention to its compilation from earlier collections of laws. The laws of Offa, Ine and Æthelberht are mentioned in a preface to the work, in which the role of Alfred as compiler is emphasized: 'Ic ða Ælfred cyning þas togædere gegaderode and awritan het, monege þara þe ure foregengan heoldon, ða ðe me licodon, and manege þara þe me ne licodon ic awearp mid minra witena geðeahte' [I, King Alfred, then gathered these [laws] together, and commanded many of them to be written, those that I liked of the ones which our predecessors observed, and many of those that I did not like I rejected in consultation with my councillors].[94] The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle also represents a new compilation of material, itself drawing on a range of sources. It offers a chronologically arranged sequence of historical records in the vernacular, covering the history of Anglo-Saxon England (from 60 BCE). Like the Old English *Martyrology*, this may have been constructed cumulatively, at least from about 890 onwards, to judge by the evidence of its earliest surviving version, the Parker Chronicle (or the A-text).[95] The production of both the Chronicle and the *Laws* is almost certainly to be associated with the drive to provide works in the vernacular which underpinned Alfred's translation programme.

The vernacular authors of the ninth century overwhelmingly show a preference for writing in prose rather than poetry. The surviving evidence would suggest that poetic composition played only a small part in the Alfredian translation programme. Some of the vernacular translations – the Old English Boethius, *Pastoral Care* and *Dialogues* – have poetic prefaces and in one case (the *Pastoral Care*) a poetic epilogue. The role of the prefaces will be discussed in the next section. The most substantial example of poetic composition linked (on tenuous grounds) to Alfred's reign is the series of poems known as the Metres in the prosimetrical version of the Old English Boethius. Any attribution of these poems to Alfred himself rests mainly on the dubious evidence of the work's prose preface.[96] The poems offer a versification of the Old English prose translations of the original Latin metres. The poet's aim is evidently to render faithfully these English prose versions of the Latin metres into poetry, presumably with a view to the production of the prosimetrical version of the work (emulating the structure of the Latin source). The poems

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93 Bately, 'Old English Prose', p. 119.
94 Liebermann (ed.), *Gesetze der Angelsächsen*, vol. i, p. 46.
95 Parkes, 'Palaeography of the Parker Manuscript'; see also Dumville, *Wessex and England*, pp. 55–98. For the text, see Bately (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS A*.
96 Godden and Irvine (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius*, vol. i, pp. 146–51.

make no attempt to develop the argument further: the versification seems to have been largely a technical process. This raises questions about contemporary perceptions of poetry, particularly in relation to our modern assumptions that poetry entails stylistic elevation and a loftiness of theme.[97]

Furthermore, the vernacular authors use techniques which are normally characterized as 'poetic' within their prose. The Old English Bede translator's use of poetic diction and creative metaphors reveals, according to Greenfield and Calder, 'a poetic turn of mind'.[98] In the prose version of the Old English Boethius the translator seems to exploit the range of stylistic registers offered by the vernacular, increasing the potential impact of his prose through the use of poetic words, alliteration and other rhetorical techniques. In the following passage, for example, the pile-up of words alliterating on *h* – *habbenne*, *hlisan*, *behealde*, *healfe* – culminates in the two-stress phrase *þæs heofones hwealfa*: 'Swa hwa swa wilnige to habbenne þone idelan hlisan and þone unnyttan gilp, behealde he on feower healfe his hu widgille þæs heofones hwealfa bið' [Whoever seeks to have vain fame and useless glory, let him consider on his four sides how spacious the heaven's arches are].[99] These effects occur more frequently, but by no means exclusively, in the passages in which the prose translator is translating the Latin metres rather than prose.

By engaging with a variety of literary forms, the ninth-century writers in English experimented with and developed the potential of the vernacular as a medium for the most wide-ranging and sophisticated literary communication. The strategies which they evolved to enhance the authority of these works are the subject of the next section of this chapter.

Authority and authorship

The success of the literary project emanating from Alfred's court depended upon replicating as far as possible for vernacular works the authority invested in the equivalent Latin ones. In many cases, the authority of the writers of the Latin source texts contributed to achieving this: 'What was being reproduced was not the structure of the texts, nor even their content with perfect fidelity, but the authority of the writers themselves.'[100] Citations of the names of Gregory, Augustine, Boethius, Bede and Orosius in the vernacular

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97 See Thornbury, 'Aldhelm's Rejection of the Muses'.
98 Greenfield and Calder, *New Critical History*, p. 58. For a caveat, see Szarmach, 'Poetic Turn of Mind'.
99 Godden and Irvine (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius*, vol. I, p. 282 (B 19.2–4).
100 Stanton, *Culture of Translation*, p. 84.

translations meant that their implicit authority was bestowed on the new vernacular versions of their works. As an important corollary to this process, the status of the language itself became inevitably enhanced by association with these writers revered as Church Fathers, ecclesiastical figures and scholars.

The English works establish an explicit link with their source authors in various ways. In the Old English Bede, as we have seen, the translator speaks as Bede throughout, investing his work with all Bede's authority but using the vernacular tongue. In this work, as Nicole Discenza argues, 'the translator removes himself from any questions of authority, quietly constructing Bede as a reliable authority whose word needs no further proof'.[101] In the Old English Orosius the translator periodically refers to Orosius by name. Bishop Wærferth, in his translation of the *Dialogues*, mentions and praises his source author Pope Gregory in the introductory passages he adds to his source.[102] The opportunity to provide the name of the source author is taken up in some of the prefaces which accompany a number of the vernacular translations. The verse preface to the *Pastoral Care*, which immediately follows the prose preface in each of the manuscripts in which it occurs, praises 'Gregorius gleawmod' [wise Gregory] whose work it introduces.[103] The preface to the Old English *Soliloquies* acknowledges explicitly its source author Augustine, as well as making more general allusion to the writings of Augustine, Gregory, Jerome and 'manege oðöre halie fædras' [many other holy fathers] who provide material for literary composition.[104]

These prefaces also have an important function in establishing a different kind of authority for the vernacular translations. In several cases they attribute the composition of the works to King Alfred. The prose and verse prefaces to the Old English *Pastoral Care* both report Alfred's own role in translating the Latin original.[105] The prose preface to the Old English Boethius explains how Alfred first translated the work into prose, and then into verse; the verse preface in the prosimetrical version praises Alfred's skill as a poet.[106] The

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101 Discenza, 'Old English *Bede*', p. 80.
102 Hecht (ed.), *Dialoge Gregors*, pp. 2, 94, 179, 260.
103 Irvine and Godden (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius with Verse Prologues and Epilogues*, p. 408.
104 Alfred, *Soliloquies*, p. 47.
105 Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, vol. i, p. 7; Irvine and Godden (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius with Verse Prologues and Epilogues*, p. 408.
106 Godden and Irvine (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius*, vol. i, pp. 239 (B PrPref.i), 384 (C VPref.i).

preface to the *Soliloquies*, perhaps in Alfred's voice (its opening is lost), brilliantly uses the metaphor of gathering wood to describe the process of compiling material for literary composition; the work's concluding comment links it explicitly to Alfred: 'Hær endiað þa cwidas þe Ælfred kining alæs of þære bec þe we hatað on (Ledene *de uidendo deo*)' [Here end the sayings which King Alfred selected from the book which we call in Latin *De videndo Deo*].[107] The preface to the Old English *Laws* asserts Alfred's participation in a different kind of compiling, that of bringing together carefully selected laws from the time of Ine, Offa and Æthelberht: 'Ic ða Ælfred cyning þas togædere gegaderode' [I, King Alfred, then gathered these [laws] together].[108] In the prose preface to the *Dialogues*, the king claims to have commissioned the Old English translation of Gregory's work: 'And forþan ic [Ælfred] sohte and wilnade to minum getreowum freondum, þæt hi me of Godes bocum be haligra manna þeawum and wundrum awriten þas æfterfylgendan lare' [And therefore I, Alfred, sought and asked of my true friends that they should write down for me from God's books the following teaching concerning the virtues and miracles of holy men].[109]

This construction of the king as translator, as well as compiler or commissioner of the vernacular works, invests them with an additional layer of authority. The king's imprimatur offers assurance to readers that these vernacular versions are authoritative in their own right. Royal power is being harnessed to convey textual authority. But, as we saw earlier, literary and political power cannot be separated out in the context of Alfred's translation programme. Alfred's roles as king and translator are mutually beneficial.

The political advantages for Alfred and his kingdom of constructing him as author of the vernacular translations inevitably raises questions about the historical authenticity of this claim. The narrative of textual production by which Alfred himself, in conjunction with a group of scholars at his court, composed the Old English Boethius, *Pastoral Care*, *Soliloquies* and *Psalms*, and commissioned translations of works including Gregory's *Dialogues* and histories by Orosius and Bede, should not necessarily be accepted at face value.[110] Such a narrative, convenient for Alfred and his circle, might have developed

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107 Alfred, *Soliloquies*, p. 97.
108 Liebermann (ed.), *Gesetze der Angelsächsen*, vol. I, p. 46.
109 Hecht (ed.), *Dialoge Gregors*, p. 1.
110 Godden, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?', and 'Alfredian Project'. For a conflicting viewpoint, see Pratt, *Political Thought*; and Bately, 'Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything?'.

momentum in later decades – and indeed centuries – when Alfred's name continued to carry weight.[111] The evidence for Alfred's role as an author is not uncontroversial. The apparently retrospective slant of the prose preface to the Old English Boethius, for example, which laments the troubles that beset Alfred 'on his dagum' [in his time], strongly indicates that the preface, at least in its current form, is unlikely to have been an original composition by Alfred, and therefore throws doubt on its evidence for Alfred's authorship of the prose and prosimetrical versions of the work.[112] Alfred seems to have had a ghost-writer in the form of Wærferth at least, to judge by the prose preface to the Old English *Dialogues* which, as we have seen, is in the king's voice but probably written by Wærferth.[113] Two authors writing well after Alfred – Ælfric in the late tenth century and William of Malmesbury in the twelfth – both attributed to Alfred works which are now known not to be by him.[114]

However we may interpret Alfred's own role in composing the works associated with his learning programme, it is clear that an experimentation with the authorial voice marks the literary output of this period, particularly the prefaces to the works. Alfred's first-person voice speaks out in various prefaces: the *Pastoral Care* prose preface, the *Soliloquies* preface (arguably), the prose preface to the Old English *Dialogues* (albeit composed by Wærferth) and the preface to the Old English *Laws*. In the *Pastoral Care* preface the first-person voice becomes a dialogue between two separate voices, one of which answers the other: 'Ac ic ða sona eft me selfum andwyrde ond cwæð . . .' [But then I immediately answered myself and said . . .]. The king also imagines the clerics speaking out: 'Swelce hie cwæden: Ure ieldran, ða ðe ðas stowa ær hioldon, hie lufodon wisdom ond ðurh ðone hie begeaton welan ond us læfdon. Her mon mæg giet gesion hiora swæð, ac we him ne cunnon æfterspyrigan' [As if they had said: Our ancestors, who formerly occupied these places, loved wisdom, and through it they obtained wealth and left it to us. Here their tracks can still be seen, but we do not know how to follow them].[115]

A different kind of first-person voice again is used in the verse preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care*. This time it is the book that speaks: 'Siðð̄an min on Englisc Ælfred kyning / awende worda gehwelc, and me his

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111 Keynes, 'Cult of King Alfred'.

112 Godden and Irvine (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius*, vol. I, p. 239 (B PrPref.6). Other recent discussions include Discenza, 'Alfred the Great'; and Bately, 'Alfredian Canon Revisited', pp. 112–14.

113 See Godden, 'Wærferth and King Alfred', pp. 36–7, and 'Alfredian Project', p. 96, note 10.

114 Ælfric, *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, p. 72, lines 6–8; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, vol. I, p. 192 (II.123).

115 Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, vol. I, p. 5.

writerum sende / suð and norð' [Afterwards King Alfred translated every word of me into English and sent me south and north to his scribes].[116] This is one of several verse prefaces to the late ninth-century English works in which the book is imagined speaking out as a *scop* [poet] in the language of vernacular heroic poetry.[117] The verse preface to the Old English *Dialogues*, thought to be composed by Bishop Wulfsige, and – arguably – the verse preface to the Old English Boethius also present the book as speaker.[118] The device, perhaps familiar to a contemporary Anglo-Saxon audience through other vernacular poetry (such as Old English riddles and scribal colophons),[119] acts here to emphasize the authority of learning which the book itself represents.

Not only in the prefaces but also in the translations themselves, the relationship between author and translator takes a variety of forms. The translator may assume the voice of the source author, as in the Old English Bede and *Pastoral Care*. In the case of the latter, there is an implicit tension between the translation itself, in which the translator speaks as Gregory (even following the preface and epilogue of his source in addressing John of Ravenna as 'Þu leofusta broður' [you, dearest brother] and 'ðu goda wer Iohannes' [you, good man John]),[120] and the ninth-century prose and verse prefaces and epilogue. The vernacular version appropriates Gregory's perspective, and simultaneously draws attention to the new context within which his instruction is to be received. In the Old English Orosius, the translator speaks in the author's voice but reminds his audience of the distinctiveness of the two ('cwæð Orosius'). In other works the translator develops a multilayered pattern of voices: in the Old English Boethius and *Soliloquies*, as we have seen, the relationship between source author and translator is imaginatively exploited to explore ways in which the contemporary world could be interpreted through its interaction with the past.

The variety of conversations taking place within the works themselves and the layering of voices which characterizes so many of them may reflect the

116 Irvine and Godden (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius with Verse Prologues and Epilogues*, p. 408.
117 See S. Irvine, 'Alfredian Prefaces and Epilogues'.
118 Irvine and Godden (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius with Verse Prologues and Epilogues*, pp. 404–6; Godden and Irvine (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius*, vol. 1, p. 384 (VPref.). For the attribution of the *Dialogues* to Wulfsige, see Sisam, 'Letter from Wynfrith to Eadburga' and 'Addendum: The Verses Prefixed to *Gregory's Dialogues*' in his *Studies*.
119 See Earl, 'King Alfred's Talking Poems' in his *Thinking About Beowulf*; O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Listening to the Scenes of Reading'; and Orton, 'Deixis and the Untransferable Text'.
120 Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, vol, 1, pp. 23, 467.

kinds of exchange and debate that enabled them to be composed. Asser's allusions to a circle of learned scholars point to a view of learning as a corporate activity within the court, as does Alfred's acknowledgement of his debt to other scholars in the *Pastoral Care* prose preface, and a description in the *Soliloquies* – independent of its source – of the ideal learning environment would also seem to support this: 'digele stoge and æmanne ælces oðres þinges, and fæawa cuðe men and creftige mid þe, ðe nan wiht ne amyrdan, ac fultmoden to þinum crefte' [a private place, free from every other distraction, and a few learned and skilful men with you who would not disturb you at all, but would assist you in your work].[121] We cannot be sure how far the vernacular works stimulated similar intellectual conversations among contemporary readers and audiences, although some were certainly known to later Anglo-Saxon authors such as Ælfric.[122] But in authorizing and developing the use of English as a literary language they played an extraordinarily influential role. The ninth century stands out as a period in which a combination of political, spiritual and intellectual imperatives, both within and beyond Anglo-Saxon England, ensured that the vernacular was promoted as a medium capable of the most sophisticated literary communication, with far-reaching implications for the history of English literature.

121 Alfred, *Soliloquies*, p. 49.
122 See Godden, 'Ælfric and the Alfredian Precedents'.

Chapter 9

The writing of history in the early Middle Ages: the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in context

RENÉE R. TRILLING

The earliest manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle begins, famously, with a genealogy linking the monarch under whose patronage the project was likely undertaken, Alfred of Wessex, to a foundational moment of Anglo-Saxon history: the arrival in Britain of Alfred's legendary ancestors, Cerdic and Cynric, in 494.[1] Beginning dramatically with the words 'ÞY GEARE ÞE WÆS AGAN FRAM CRISTES ACENnesse .cccc. wintra ⁊.xciiii. uuintra, þa Cerdic ⁊ Cynric his sunu cuom up æt Cerdicesoran mid .v. scipum' [In the year when 494 years had passed since the birth of Christ, Cerdic and his son Cynric landed at Cerdic's Shore with five ships],[2] the Parker Chronicle, now known more commonly as MS A, places this event alongside another key historical point of reference, the birth of Christ. The text then goes on to record two genealogies: one stretching from Cerdic back to Woden, and one tracing the line from Alfred's father, Æthelwulf, back to Cerdic. These prefatory genealogies fill the first recto of the manuscript, and they tell us a great deal about how the reader is meant to understand the chronicle entries that follow it. Begun under the auspices of the Alfredian intellectual reforms of the late ninth century, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is an ambitious historiographical enterprise. It sets out to document the history of the Anglo-Saxons on the island of Britain; but as this opening genealogy attests, its earliest version envisions that history as the history of a particular group of monarchs – the Cerdicings, or descendants of Cerdic – with a particular ideological impetus. Its project is to offer a single, monolithic vision of English history. Many of its annals are brief, but they sketch out

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1 Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 173, fols. 1ᵛ–32ᵛ (Winchester, s. IX/X–XI²), also known as MS A or the Parker Chronicle. See Bately (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS A*.
2 Bately (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS A*, p. 1. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

a dramatic story, full of tales of family honour, which sees dominion as a genealogical inheritance and includes its readers in that inheritance by virtue of their subjection to the West Saxon monarchs. Its beginnings sketch out a legendary *translatio imperii*, and its end-point is the realization of that empire in the final defeat of the Danish invaders and the glorious reign of Alfred himself. In its opening pages, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle declares that English history is not the history of a place, but of a people – Alfred's people.

Yet this particular people, defined by its ruling family as much as by ethnic or linguistic commonality, was only one of the many ethnic and political entities that inhabited the island of Britain – some from much earlier than 494. Bede's well-known description of the island's successive occupation by Britons, Picts, Irish, Romans and English acknowledges this diversity (although he too seeks to unify these groups under the heading of a 'Christian nation'), and it was certainly known to the author who translated Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* into Old English at around the same time that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle itself was first compiled.[3] Political divisions are likewise recognized by alternative chronicle sources like the Mercian Register and the *Annales Cambriae*, or even more fully developed historical narratives, like the *Historia Brittonum* that was ascribed to Nennius during this period, while the Old English translator of Orosius' *Historiarum aduersum paganos libri septem* seems intent on incorporating England as one tiny fragment within a more global historical perspective.[4] Even the later development of the Chronicle itself begins to undermine the hegemony envisioned by its first West Saxon patrons.[5] The tenth, eleventh and early twelfth centuries bore witness to the proliferation of modes of historical discourse in medieval England, through media as varied as the continuation and translation of the Chronicle texts, the production of historical poetry, and full-scale Latin histories by Welsh, Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman writers. In this chapter, I would like to explore how these textual productions – some explicitly literary, many not – speak to one another as evidence of various

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3 *HE*, i. See also Miller (ed. and trans.), *Old English Bede*.

4 Bately (ed.), *Old English Orosius*.

5 The extant Chronicle manuscripts are: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 173, fols. 1ᵛ–32ᵛ (Winchester, s. ix/x–xi²; MS A), London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. vi, fols. 1–34 + A. iii, fol. 178 (Abingdon, s. x²; MS B), London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. i, fols. 115ᵛ–64 (Abingdon or Canterbury, s. xi¹–xi²; MS C), London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. iv, fols. 3–86 (Worcester or York, s. xi med–xi²; MS D), Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 636 (Peterborough, s. xii¹, xii med; MS E), London, British Library, Cotton Domitian viii, fols. 30–70 (Christ Church, Canterbury, s. xi/xii; MS F), London, British Library, Cotton Otho B. xi, fols. 39–47 + Additional 34652, fol. 2 (Winchester, s. x med + s. xi¹; MS G) and the two fragmentary annals found in London, British Library, Cotton Domitian ix, fol. 9 (s. xii¹; MS H). For manuscript data, see Ker, *Catalogue*.

groups at various times and places, all wielding historiography as a tool for socio-political ends. They are texts ranging from chronicles and histories to poems and prefaces, written by people who may have identified themselves as English, British, Scottish, Irish, Danish, or a combination thereof, and in vernacular languages and Latin alike. Some, like the C-text of the Chronicle, gaze back nostalgically on a purported 'golden age' now long gone and contrast it with a lament for present sufferings, while others, such as the poem *Durham*, focus more on the present, and even the future, in their narration of past events.

These texts document the emergence of a wide range of historical projects in the early medieval period, and they demonstrate that it is both impractical and undesirable to speak of a single mode of early medieval English 'history'. I will first chart how some of these histories work to present the very monolithic English identity evident in the Alfredian genealogical prefaces. But I also want to set these histories against a backdrop of the variety and diversity of historiographic production in early medieval England, and especially to think about how the monolith ultimately contributes to its own unmaking. The narrative of early Germanic nationalism promoted by the Cerdicing dynasty from the late ninth century onwards was transmitted to later generations, but so were the alternative viewpoints expressed in the histories originating outside the borders of West Saxon dominion. As we shall see, many of these histories even managed to transmit multiple viewpoints within a single text, recognizing (as MS A of the Chronicle does not) that there can be more than one version of history, and that historical 'truth' sometimes eludes even the most dedicated historian. These histories of early medieval England are our sources not only for what happened in the centuries before the Norman Conquest, but also for how the island's inhabitants drew meaning from those events and shaped narratives that would influence the future.

Heroes and warriors: English identity in the early Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle seems an ideal site to begin exploring the histories of early medieval England for a number of reasons. In the first place, it is the largest sustained historiographical enterprise of the period. More importantly, however, the Chronicle differs significantly from the Latin Insular histories that came before it. Although produced, like all documents in this period, by ecclesiastical scribes, the Chronicle draws its authority not, as Bede does, from Church-sanctioned Latinity and monastic dedication to scholarship, but rather

from long-standing state power linked to a heroic warrior ethos. For an illustration, let us turn to the text of MS A. Although it is the oldest manuscript, it is not the original Chronicle. The first set of annals, from the arrival of Julius Caesar to the reign of Alfred, forms what is known as the Common Stock of the Chronicle tradition and was first set down at Winchester around 892, during the literary and educational reforms of King Alfred. The Common Stock is preserved in more or less the same form across the extant manuscripts, and MS A is an early Winchester copy of this first Chronicle. Yet its proximity to the original Common Stock, and its close connection to Alfred's court, make it a classic example of Cerdicing ideology, and MS A demonstrates clearly how the writing of history was linked explicitly to the assertion of power. In addition to tracing lineages from Cerdic to Woden and from Alfred to Cerdic, MS A's genealogical preface outlines the succession of kingship between the years of Cerdic's arrival in Britain and the accession of Alfred four centuries later: '[Cerdic] hæfde þæt rice .xvi. gear, ⁊ þa he gefor, þa feng his sunu Cynric to þam rice ⁊ heold .xvii. winter. Ða he gefor, þa feng Ceol to þam rice ⁊ heold .vi. gear. Ða he gefor, þa feng Ceolwulf to his broþur, ⁊ he ricsode .xvii. gear, ⁊ hiera cyn geþ to Cerdice' [(Cerdic) held the kingdom for sixteen years, and when he went forth, then his son Cynric acceded to the kingdom and held it for seventeen winters. When he went forth, then Ceol acceded to the kingdom and held it for six years. When he went forth, then his brother Ceolwulf acceded, and he ruled for seventeen years, and their lineage goes back to Cerdic].[6] Following these three, the genealogical preface accounts for seventeen more secure transfers of power from one dead king to another 'þæs cyn geþ to Cerdice' [whose lineage goes back to Cerdic].[7] The last is the accession of Alfred, 'þa was agan his ielde .xxiii. wintra ⁊ .ccc. ⁊ . xcvi. wintra þæs þe his cyn ærest Westseaxna lond on Wealum geeodon' [when he had 23 winters to his age and 300 and 96 winters since his lineage first conquered the land of the West Saxons from the Welsh].[8] Twenty-one orderly transfers of power that kept the rule of Wessex within the same lineage – the descendants of Cerdic – across four centuries certainly seem to bespeak a mandate for dominion, perhaps even divine sanction of Cerdicing rule. The kings of Wessex, MS A's genealogical preface asserts, trace their lineage to the most noble of Germanic families, and that lineage has remained in power

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6 Bately (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS A*, p. 1. On the genealogical material, see Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies'; and Dumville, 'West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List', and 'West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List: Manuscripts and Texts'.
7 Bately (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS A*, pp. 1–2.
8 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

since the first West Saxons arrived on the island. That sense of continuity persists throughout the first millennium of this Chronicle, placing Cerdic and his descendants clearly at the centre of English history. With the accession of a new West Saxon king, the annalist often gives a brief genealogy that reaffirms his connection to Cerdic.[9] The most elaborate genealogy outside of the one in the preface is that of Æthelwulf, Alfred's father, whose lineage *s.a.* 855 is traced not only to Cerdic, but finally back to Adam himself. English history, for the first Anglo-Saxon Chronicler, is very much a family affair.

Events, too, seem to conspire to enhance the glory of the Cerdicings: 'history' in MS A doesn't really get going until the Germanic tribes arrive on the island, and once it does, it consists chiefly of the narration of battles and conquests. Like other chronicles, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is not full-blown narrative history. Its records are brief, often allusive, and many of its annals are barren, especially in the beginning, encouraging us to think of the text as free from the rhetorical shaping of a literary work.[10] Yet the stories it tells require the reader to fill in the gaps, guided by the tone and attitude of the preceding entries.[11] In its early annals, MS A documents the history of Britain as a Christian nation, chronicling mostly Roman emperors and Christian apostles and emphasizing England's historical ties to Rome. In fact, the annals for the first five centuries – the period of Roman occupation and rule by the Britons – are largely barren except for the occasional reference to Roman history. Everything changes in 449, when Hengist and Horsa lead their Germanic warriors to Britain at the invitation of Vortigern, king of the Britons. With the arrival of Cerdic and Cynric *s.a.* 495, the annals for subsequent centuries offer increasingly detailed accounts of battle after battle fought and (mainly) won by Cerdic and his descendants, especially those fought by Alfred against the Vikings in the late ninth century.[12] As the nobleman Æthelweard, who translated a now lost version of the Chronicle into Latin in the late tenth century, puts it, 'Quin etiam de priscorum aduentu parentum a Germania in Brittanniam, tot bella, tot cædes uirorum, classiumque periclitationem gurgite oceani non paruam, in subpositis paginulis facilius inuenire potes exemplar' [In the following pages you can very easily find by way of example so many wars and slayings of men and no small wreck of navies on the waves of ocean, especially with reference to the arrival of our ancestors

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9 *S.a.* 552, 597, 611, 674, 676 and 688.

10 White, *Content of the Form*, discusses the historian's distinction between 'annal', 'chronicle' and 'history'.

11 Stodnick, 'Sentence to Story'.

12 For an overview of the Chronicle's rhetoric during the Alfredian era, see C. Clark, 'Narrative Mode'; and, more recently, Sheppard, *Families of the King*.

in Britain from Germany].[13] (For Æthelweard, a cousin of the royal family, they were indeed 'our ancestors'.) The entries resound with the language of military victory, and they recount stories of bravery and heroism that could stand easily alongside the deeds of mythic heroes like Beowulf. Taken as a whole, these repeated references back to the pagan Germanic mercenaries who helped to conquer the land held by the Britons in the fifth century work to tie the idea of a nation produced by the text to the concept of heroic glory that underwrites the Old English literary tradition. Just as the annal numbers themselves, both fruitful and barren, bespeak the continuity of time across the centuries,[14] the records of Cerdicing triumph emphasize the continuity of a single family line (however complicated and far-flung the genealogy may have become) characterized by its dedication to the values of bravery, heroism and victory in battle. It is no accident that this version of English history demonstrates considerable overlap with the kinds of character and event that populate traditional Germanic myth and legend (of which more below).

But MS A does not romanticize its heroes merely, or at least solely, for the purposes of entertainment. This is a text that seeks to unify English history under the rubric of Cerdicing rule. The chronicler of the Common Stock chose deliberately to centre his narrative on the heroic deeds of Alfred's ancestors, and MS A is not interested in the competing claims of other narratives or groups. Instead, it is a state-sanctioned deployment of ideology that interpellates its readers, first and foremost, as subjects of the Wessex kings, and that interpellation is continued by subsequent addition to and dissemination of the Chronicle texts. Indeed, as Nicholas Brooks has recently argued, 'The focus on kings, that is on the descendants of Cerdic and Egbert, of Alfred and his successors on the English throne right down to Edward the Confessor and beyond, is the most striking and consistent feature of these vernacular annals.'[15] With its continuation after the Common Stock ends, the Chronicle adopts the narrative of a glorified Cerdicing dynasty – at least in its three southern manuscripts, A, B and C – and uses it to shape its presentation of events throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries.[16] The most striking examples of such shaping are the four poems that stand in for annals *s.a.* 937, 942, 973 and 975.[17] The first two, known more generally by the titles *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *The Capture*

13 Æthelweard, *Chronicle*, p. 1.
14 Clemoes, 'Language in Context'.
15 Brooks, 'Why is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* about Kings?', p. 47.
16 Simon Taylor (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS B*; and O'Brien O'Keeffe (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS C*.
17 Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, pp. 16–24. The poem on Edgar's coronation, *s.a.* 973 in MS A, is found *s.a.* 974 in MSS B and C.

of the Five Boroughs, describe military victories won by two of Alfred's grandsons, Æthelstan and Edmund. At the Battle of Brunanburh, Æthelstan, with his brother Edmund's help, defeated a combined army of Norse and Scottish forces. The victory did not help to gain territory for the kings of Wessex, although it did help to stem the tide of Viking incursion into Æthelstan's territory. But it served an important ideological purpose, because Æthelstan was leading a unified force of Saxons and Mercians.[18] The existence of a dramatic and finely wrought poem, instead of a standard prose annal, is tribute to the significance of this event: the glorious victory is commemorated in a poetic space that allows both Saxons and Mercians to see themselves as inheritors of a grand epic tradition, represented as warriors in the classic Germanic style and subject to their victorious *hlaford*, Æthelstan. The same is true of *The Capture of the Five Boroughs*, which presents Edmund as the liberator of his Danish subjects from the hard oppression of the Northmen. In both of these battle poems, the Cerdicing rulers become forces for the unification of a kingdom through the conquest of its land and the acclamation of its people. Æthelstan is 'beorna beahgifa' [ring-giver of men] and 'eorla drihten' [lord of earls], and his victory at Brunanburh is the greatest swordplay known in the island 'siþþan eastan hider / Engle ⁊ Seaxe up becoman, / ofer brad brimu Brytene sohtan' [since the Angles and Saxons came up out of the east, sought Britain across the wide sea].[19] Edmund likewise is called 'Engla þeoden' [leader of the English] and 'maga mundbora' [protector of men].[20] Both the classic poetic epithets and the dramatic gestures back to the founding of the Cerdicing dynasty help to reinforce the link between Germanic heroism and the current rulers, and both poems also make copious reference to the geographic and ethnic diversity contained within the kingdom, emphasizing the extent to which Æthelstan and Edmund have expanded their domains. To be English, these poems assert, is to be subject to Cerdicing rule, but it is also to be heir to a tradition of brave warriors and great victories on an epic scale. In these poems, traditional belief systems are upheld by the literary forms that were most evocative of 'tradition' as an institution: heroic alliterative metre. Poetry places Alfred's descendants on a par with the heroes of Germanic myth and legend.

These Chronicle poems, as they are known, are in many ways an apotheosis of what this version of the Chronicle tries to accomplish as historiography. As subjects of the Cerdicing dynasty, its readers partake of the glory chronicled first in the entries of the Common Stock and later in the poetic

18 Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 343.
19 Bately (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS A, s.a.* 937.
20 *Ibid., s.a.* 942.

entries commemorating glorious victories and noble kings. The *comitatus* ethos that underwrites the story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard recounted *s.a.* 755 (in which warriors choose to die rather than to serve the man who killed their lord) and that resounds through the battles of Brunanburh and the Five Boroughs is ideology in its purest form, and, through its lens, the Anglo-Saxons under the Wessex dynasty are depicted as a nation of heroic warriors. For many years, scholars of the Anglo-Saxon period were willing to accept such monolithic depictions at face value, and the image of the Anglo-Saxons as noble Germanic warriors dominated the field of Anglo-Saxon studies in history and literature alike. An early nineteenth-century editor of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, James Ingram, describes the text as 'original and authentic testimony of contemporary writers to the most important transactions of our forefathers, both by sea and land, from their first arrival in this country to the year 1154'.[21] For Ingram, as for most of his contemporaries, history was intimately connected with notions of self and community. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was valuable because it told readers who the Anglo-Saxons were, and presented a comfortably unified vision of English identity that transcended historical distance. These were as much 'our forefathers' for nineteenth-century British scholars as they were for the Chronicle's original audiences.

Moreover, the early Chronicle's notion of a heroic English nationalism dovetailed nicely with the view of vernacular poetry that was fashionable at the time: heroic epics like *Beowulf* and *Widsið* were thought to encapsulate the warrior spirit of Anglo-Saxon England in their allusions to Germanic myth and legend. As a result, the noble ideology of the Chronicle was both conditioned and reinforced by the sensibilities ascribed to the vernacular Germanic poetic tradition that comes down to us, not surprisingly, in manuscripts transcribed during the tenth and early eleventh centuries – the height of Cerdicing power. In the Exeter Book, for example, poems like *Deor*, *Widsith* and *The Ruin* show Anglo-Saxons looking back on their cultural inheritance as descendants of those Germanic mercenaries who displaced the Britons, and revelling in it (despite some discomfiture with their ancestors' paganism).[22] They infer a familiarity with the larger tradition of Germanic legend, making allusive reference to the stories of heroes and mythic cycles that were, presumably, familiar to their audiences. *Beowulf*, too, depends upon a familiarity with these traditions, and its narrative of brave deeds supplemented with digressive tales

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21 Ingram (ed.), *Saxon Chronicle*, p. ii.
22 Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3501, fols. 8–130 (s. x²). For texts, see Krapp and Dobbie (eds.), *Exeter Book*; and Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*.

of battles won and kingdoms lost participates in precisely the same heroic tradition that underwrites the ideology of the early Chronicle narratives.[23] Even the fragmentary remains of *The Fight at Finnsburh* and *Waldere* excite the interest of readers because of the noble deeds they partially recount and their relationship to that heroic ideology.[24]

The popularity of these heroic poems is evidenced by their preservation in manuscript form, and the influence of Germanic legend was, as we have seen, both felt and exploited to great rhetorical effect by the compilers of the early Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. It also gave rise to epic poetry of a more contemporary stripe, such as the incomplete 325-line poem glorifying the English defenders of Essex against Viking attack in *The Battle of Maldon*.[25] The battle itself occurred on 10 August 991, and the local troops, led by Byrhtnoth, were defeated. But the event prompted the composition of a poem that is now viewed as the epitome of the Anglo-Saxon heroic ethos: Byrhtnoth gallantly (and misguidedly) allows the Vikings to land so that his men can face them in battle, and after his death his loyal retainers fight on to avenge him, much like the men in the Cynewulf and Cyneheard episode of the Chronicle. Byrhtnoth is described as a loyal servant of his king, Æthelred (203), and his well-spoken men offer a series of valiant speeches declaring their devotion to their lord, even unto death, and fight bravely to the end in fulfilment of promises made in the mead hall (209–325). Even in defeat, the English are represented as heroic warriors in the traditional mould, and the poem itself is one of the great literary and historical achievements of the era. As a historical monument, *The Battle of Maldon* embodies the heroic ideology promulgated by the early Chronicle as well: it celebrates the nation's Germanic heritage, and it deploys the epic mode as a rhetorical strategy to exploit the cultural capital of legend and tradition. The poem shows that the same warrior prowess that allowed Cerdic and Cynric to found a dynasty on the island in the fifth century can be found in its inhabitants half a millennium later, in spite of the fact that their battle ends in defeat rather than victory. Perhaps most importantly, this poem, like *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *The Capture of the Five Boroughs* before it, insists on the diverse nature of the people who unite under Byrhtnoth's

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23 London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A. xv, fols. 132–201ᵛ (s. x/xi). See Fulk *et al.* (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*.

24 The *Finnsburh Fragment* was a leaf, now missing, in a Lambeth Palace manuscript transcribed by George Hickes in the early eighteenth century; see Fulk *et al.* (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, pp. 273–90. For *Waldere*, see Copenhagen, Royal Library, MS Ny khl. saml. 167b; and Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, pp. 4–6.

25 London, British Library, MS Cotton Otho A. xii, fols. 56–62, destroyed in the fire at Ashburnham House in 1731. See Scragg (ed.), *Battle of Maldon*.

banner: Mercians and Northumbrians fight alongside the men of Essex for the protection and glory of a larger unity, 'Æthelredes eard' [53a; Æthelred's land]. The English are clearly defined by their opposition to the Vikings, and regional differences are subsumed by a larger corporate identity as followers of Byrhtnoth, subjects of Æthelred, and inhabitants of England.

Born of a nineteenth-century nationalism that was itself both imperialist and monolithic, the discipline of Anglo-Saxon studies had no reason to question the singular nature of a national identity that both its artefacts and its practitioners seemed to espouse. It did not matter that literary monuments like the early Chronicle manuscripts focused not on the population across the whole of Britain but rather on the rulers of what was still only a relatively small portion of it in the 890s. West Saxon domination of the island would not come until the mid-tenth century, and even when it did, it did not have the totalizing effect on Insular culture that MS A implies. As much recent historical work has shown, the later subjects of the Cerdicings continued to hold on to their earlier regional identities; Scandinavian influence remained strong in the north-east, for example, and the Scots continued to push at the borders of this more expansive kingdom (as discussed in Chapters 23 and 25 below). Even those who fell under the rule of Wessex early on, such as the Welsh, maintained a strong separate identity, as we shall see below. But texts like MS A of the Chronicle, with its emphasis on the rulers of Wessex and their heroic exploits, remain key tools in understanding how late Anglo-Saxon England understood itself through its relationship to its history and through a self-fashioning, conscious or unconscious, that took place through the medium of textuality.

Celtic correctives: alternative histories of later Anglo-Saxon England

Crucially, however, the Common Stock of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was not the only history being disseminated in the tenth and eleventh centuries in England. The *Historia Brittonum* attributed to Nennius was one of the most popular and widely read histories produced in medieval Britain. First written in 829/30 in Wales, it survives today in more than thirty-five manuscripts that represent nine different recensions, including one produced in 943/4 during the reign of King Edmund – important evidence of both the continuation and the broadening of historical inquiry under the Cerdicing rulers.[26] Like the

26 Nennius, *British History*, pp. 1–8; and Dumville (ed.), *Historia Brittonum, 3*, p. 3.

early Chronicle, the *Historia Brittonum* expounds a narrative of origins for the history of the island, and it uses the genealogies of rulers and regnal transitions to lend an aura of antiquity to its characters. But its methodology differs greatly from the one that underwrites the earlier English historiographical perspective. In the first place, it offers multiple origins. This is in part because the author is unsure which stories are correct. Of the island's first inhabitants, Nennius writes 'Si quis scire voluerit quo tempore post diluvium habitata est haec insula, hoc experimentum bifarie inveni' [If anyone wants to know when this island was inhabited after the Flood, I find two alternative explanations],[27] and he goes on to narrate the settlement of the island by Brutus, first from classical Roman sources, and then from biblical history. These two narratives, presented side by side, offer the reader the option to choose between them or to let them both stand; Nennius, as historian, does not make that choice for us, but recognizes his own limitations in adjudicating between competing narratives.

In addition, Nennius accounts for the origins, not only of the British, but of the Irish, Picts and Saxons as well. He does not focus on the history of just one people, but takes an Insular perspective, working from a wide range of sources that were either not available to or not utilized by the first compiler of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Instead of the loosely connected, briefly noted annals of much of the Common Stock, the *Historia Brittonum* weaves together the strands of its various sources into a more fully realized tapestry. This text elaborates narratives, rather than simply noting events, from the very beginning of the island's habitation. Among these stories are many that would become permanent fixtures in the legendary history of Britain popularized by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century and beyond: tales of King Arthur, the portent of the two dragons solved by the child without a father, and the founding story of Brutus' arrival.[28] Nennius also tells how the Picts came to Scotland, and the Irish to Ireland, long before even the Romans arrived, let alone the English. As a result, the *Historia* provides space for multiple voices in a way that we do not see in MS A of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

Indeed, the most striking contrast between the *Historia Brittonum* and the early Chronicle lies in its treatment of the English themselves. When the English do arrive, they are the pagan Germanic mercenaries led by Hengist and Horsa, invited by the British king Vortigern to fight the Scots and Irish for him. It does not take long for the Anglo-Saxons to betray Vortigern, and the poor Christian

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27 Nennius, *British History*, p. 60 (trans. p. 19).
28 *Ibid.*, pp. 76 (trans. p. 35), 70–2 (29–31), 60–3 (19–22).

Britons see their land stolen from them by a superior military force. Bede and Gildas ascribe this fate, a much-deserved punishment from God, to the Britons' own lack of piety, but Nennius places the blame squarely on the shoulders of Vortigern, led astray by his lust for Hengist's daughter. The Anglo-Saxons here are clearly history's villains, both as pagans and as traitors, and the Britons are exonerated in the eyes of future readers, if not in God's. These Anglo-Saxon conquerors are not the noble forebears of a powerful nation, but simply a band of barbarians who took advantage of a weak ruler. From the Celtic perspective, the history of the island was already ancient and venerable by the time Cerdic and Cynric landed on its shores. In fact, Cerdic and Cynric do not appear at all in the *Historia Brittonum*; the Germanic conquest of the island is led by Hengist. Even the extensive genealogies of English kings provided in the *Historia*'s later pages cover the royal families of Bernicia, Kent, Mercia and Deira – but not Wessex. This is England's past told from a Celtic point of view, in which the English, and the Cerdicings in particular, are relatively minor characters relegated to the margins of history, especially when compared to the likes of Brutus and Arthur.

The collection of Latin annals known as the *Annales Cambriae* shares a similar perspective: that is, one in which the English play a supporting rather than a lead role. First compiled from a variety of Celtic sources in ninth-century Wales and updated, at various intervals, well into the thirteenth century,[29] the *Annales Cambriae* do not share the *Historia Brittonum*'s pretensions to full-blown historiography, and they do not offer accounts of Trojan origins, mystical prophecies, or even Roman rule. Like the early Chronicle, the *Annales* offer rather sparse accounts of major events, beginning in the mid-fifth century, and the majority of these events are things like battles and the deaths of kings, bishops and saints. Unlike the Chronicle, however, the famous people memorialized in these annals are Welsh and Irish: St Brigid, St Patrick, St Columba. There is no mention of the arrival of Cerdic and Cynric, nor of Hengist and Horsa, on Britain's shores; when the English are first mentioned, it is because of the Augustinian mission to Kent. The English are the outsiders here. They are most often referred to in these annals in the context of battles fought by them against the Welsh, in the same category as the Vikings or tribes on the continent. The Cerdicings do not become a major force in this version of history until the tenth century, when the deaths of key figures such as Alfred, Æthelflæd, Æthelstan and Edmund are mentioned explicitly. And why should they? For the Welsh annalist, these figures are tangential to the deeds and the concerns of

29 Dumville (ed.), *Annales Cambriae*, pp. v–xv.

his own *gens*, the people that are the subject of his particular history. The English are no more significant to the Welsh chroniclers than the Welsh are to the English chroniclers.

And yet the Welsh annals enjoyed an amazingly robust afterlife in the literary culture of early medieval England. One of the recensions of the *Historia Brittonum* has been traced by David Dumville to the court of Edmund, of *Five Boroughs* fame.[30] Produced around 944, this so-called 'Vatican' recension provides good evidence for the circulation and promulgation of Welsh texts in English scriptoria of the mid-tenth century and an interest in Celtic historical sources did not die out in the tenth century. Not only was the *Historia Brittonum* present at Edmund's English court, but it was copied out, edited and passed along by English scribes, eventually making its way through various incarnations to France by the twelfth century. And this was just one of nine Latin recensions that made their way through England, Wales, Ireland and France in the early Middle Ages. Clearly, the texts that aroused interest among English intellectuals in the tenth century were still being preserved well after the Norman Conquest, and throughout the range of Norman power, as part of an Insular historical legacy. The Normans, as we shall see, were obsessed with the early history of their newly conquered island, and the great historiographical projects of the early twelfth century would make good use of the wealth of historical material they inherited. But even before the Normans arrived in 1066, early medieval English history was branching out in new directions, expressing new viewpoints, offering new interpretations, and creating new arcs for historical meaning. Some of the most compelling evidence for these changes comes, strangely enough, from the very textual tradition that initially (according to the evidence we have) set out to cast a heroic English identity in monumental stone: the transmission of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

Reading the Chronicle against itself in late Anglo-Saxon England

Despite its early attempts to establish a hegemonic view of English history, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is far from a unified text. Its various manuscripts originate from the same Common Stock, but they draw on countless different sources of historical evidence and are propagated in a number of regional centres, taking vastly different shapes depending on who is writing, and for whom, and when, where and why. They demonstrate, in concrete terms, how

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30 Dumville (ed.), *Historia Brittonum, 3*, pp. 3–23, 47–54.

ideological artefacts can defy the intentions of their creators and how all texts ultimately reveal the existence of dissenting voices and viewpoints. When set alongside other historical writing from the same era – such as the Chronicle manuscripts of the Northern Recension, to say nothing of Æthelweard's Latin *Chronicon*, or the Celtic perspective preserved in the *Annales Cambriae* – these records produce an image of considerable diversity, rather than unity, on the island of Britain in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries.

More importantly, however, both the Chronicle and the critical history surrounding it exemplify the notion of multiplicity that this chapter takes as its rubric. The title 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' designates a group of eight extant manuscripts containing different versions of texts that chronicle the history of Britain from the arrival of Julius Caesar to 1154.[31] Each manuscript represents a unique witness to a historical tradition that takes the original Alfredian material, shapes it, adapts it and adds to it for the needs of local audiences. The result, not surprisingly, is a set of vastly divergent narratives.

The manuscripts themselves were produced between the 890s and the mid-twelfth century, and despite their shared reliance on the original Common Stock, they are characterized more by their variety than by anything else. Generated at different times and places, written by many people inter-mittently or by one or two as a sustained project, and responding to a wide range of historical circumstances, these manuscripts tell the story of early medieval England in their codicology as well as in their contents. MS A, as we have seen, was begun at Alfred's court in the 890s, but it was subsequently continued and updated by upwards of a dozen people as it moved around southern England until the early twelfth century.[32] Most of the entries in this manuscript are written in Old English, but some are in Latin; most are also prose, but MS A incorporates four of the famous Chronicle poems into its annals. This manuscript records the birth of a nation almost as it is happening, and it presupposes an audience invested in the idea of a unified England ruled by Alfred's descendants, who can claim descent from the great Germanic mercenary Cerdic. MS E, on the other hand, represents a more retrospective use of the Common Stock material that reflects on the significance of pro-found historical changes between the age of Alfred and its own present. MS E was written by only two people, and was first copied at Peterborough around 1121 from a version that no longer survives. This manuscript was subsequently updated by a second scribe until 1154, making MS E the only Chronicle

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31 See note 5 above.
32 See Bately (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS A*, pp. xxi–xliii.

manuscript that records events into the twelfth century.[33] MS E also contains some poetic entries describing the resistance to Norman rule,[34] but they differ greatly from the metrical forms of standard Old English poetry that characterize the poems of MS A, and they are a far cry from the celebratory paeans of the tenth-century annals. This manuscript views English history from a distinctly post-Conquest perspective; from their later vantage point, further removed from the politics of the royal court, the scribes of MS E are more fully aware of the broader significance of events.

Both manuscripts, A and E, tell their stories in the language of the people, Old English, and this is in part what distinguishes the Chronicle as an enterprise of historiography. But other versions of the Chronicle reach out to Latin-literate audiences as well. MS F, like MS E, is a later production, and the entries are briefer and more condensed than their counterparts in the earlier versions, but it is a fully bilingual chronicle, with annals containing material in both Old English and Latin.[35] This manuscript tells us not only that a non-English-speaking audience existed in England in the early twelfth century, but also that they were interested in knowing more about the history of the land they inhabited. Taken together, these three manuscripts begin to give us some indication of the sheer range and variety of both form and content that comprise the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle – and Anglo-Saxon historiography more generally.

The other five extant manuscripts display a similar variety, originating at places as diverse as Winchester, Canterbury, Abingdon and York, tossing in the occasional verse or Latin annal, and arguing implicitly for different interpretations of history at various times and places. Some, like MS A, were begun early and updated at intervals for centuries; others, like MS E, are later copies that were actively updated for only a few decades after their initial production. Each manuscript draws on different sources, though many overlap; indeed, the complex web of interrelationships between these manuscripts has demanded long and careful study and still defies explanation in some respects.[36] As a group, then, the Chronicle manuscripts represent a huge effort on the part of early medieval England to keep track of its own history and to shape the understanding of its reading audiences. But they also embody the fragmentation, competition and continuous fluidity that drive historiography as a discursive enterprise. The changing political face of early medieval England would

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33 See Irvine (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS E*, p. xiii.
34 *Ibid.*, *s.a.* 1075, 1086, 1104.
35 See Baker (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS F*.
36 For an overview, see Bately, *Texts and Textual Relationships*.

demand flexibility – of ideology, of form, of perspective – from its chroniclers. As a text that was by its very nature constantly in flux, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was uniquely suited to answer this demand, and the resulting set of texts allows us to chart the changing needs and desires of early medieval English audiences with respect to their histories.

As we have already seen, Chronicle manuscripts like A represent an early version of state-sanctioned historical ideology. A very different vision of English history emerges, however, from that ideology's descent through the manuscripts of the Northern Recension. The Northern Recension is the name given to the hypothetical exemplar that lies behind MSS D, E and F of the Chronicle. This exemplar was based on the Common Stock, but it also incorporated material from Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* and a set of northern annals, now lost, from Northumbria, as well as other northern historical sources. As a result, the manuscripts descended from this exemplar, although based on the Common Stock tradition generated at Alfred's court in the early 890s, contain a great deal of information that is not present in the version of the Chronicle represented by MS A. Part of the reason for this is their distance, in both time and space, from the centre of Cerdicing power in tenth-century Wessex. MSS D, E and F were all begun much later than MSS A, B and C; D has its origins in the second half of the eleventh century, and E and F were both copied in the early twelfth, as we have already seen.[37] By this point in history, of course, it would have been rather difficult to think of the Cerdicing rulers as glorious Germanic warlords. England had been suffering the depredations of Viking raids since the 980s; the country was conquered by the Danish king Swein Forkbeard in 1014, whose descendants ruled both England and Denmark from 1016–42; and the Norman Conquest of 1066 was just around the corner. For a scribe in the 1050s, let alone one in the early decades of the twelfth century, the narrative of Cerdicing hegemony would not have been merely unconvincing; it would have seemed downright ludicrous.[38]

The changes in historical circumstances and in the information readily available to the scribes of MSS D, E and F are apparent in the annals that continue the historical record after the Common Stock ends at about 890. Here, the northern Chronicle shifts its focus in the tenth- and eleventh-century annals away from the dominance of Cerdicing ideology to account for matters of more

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37 Cubbin (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS D*, pp. xi, liii–lv; Irvine (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS E*, p. xiii; Baker (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS F*, pp. lxxvi–lxxix.
38 As Brooks points out, the possibility of continuous recordkeeping by priests in the royal household could also underlie the changing attitudes of the Chronicle texts as the throne changes hands ('Why is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* about Kings?', pp. 51–4).

local concern. One clear indicator of this shift in focus is the relative absence of those stirring verse memorials about the tenth-century Wessex kings; MS D preserves *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *The Capture of the Five Boroughs*, but none of the other traditional verses about Alfred's descendants, and MSS E and F have none at all. Yet there is no lack of poetry in these Chronicle manuscripts; although the bilingual MS F preserves no verse, MSS D and E are rich in prosodic variations. Interestingly, the poetry we find there is simply not the metrical heroic variety that dominates both the earlier Chronicle manuscripts and the Old English tradition in general. There are no brave warriors dying to avenge their lord, or noble generals leading their people into battle. Instead of memorializing the military victories of the Cerdicings, these brief verses highlight very different kinds of events that chronicle, not the glory and grandeur of a victorious nation, but the suffering of a conquered people.

Needless to say, these are not fit topics for the alliterative tradition of Germanic poetry, and the verse of the northern Chronicle takes on new forms to serve this new purpose. For example, rhythmical and rhyming verses impart a sense of foreboding about plans for northern rebellion against William the Conqueror made at a marriage celebration in Norwich in 1075, and the reprisals for that rebellion are likewise commemorated, emphasizing the brutality of William's reign. Further verses recount the nation's sufferings under its Norman conquerors and celebrate William's death (*s.a.* 1087). Unlike the heroic poems about Alfred's descendants, these verses do not draw their readers into a shared sense of heroic identity with their brave warrior kings. Instead, they help to establish a sense of English identity separate from the monarchy. Some of the verses are merely topical. A brief poetic reflection about St Margaret's hesitancy to marry Malcolm of Scotland makes sense both because of Margaret's reputation for piety and because her granddaughter, Matilda, would be a party to the succession crisis following the death of Henry I in 1135. The kinds of event memorialized in these poems reflect a growing sense of the Chronicle's widening scope – specifically, of its scope beyond the borders of Wessex and the temporal influence of the Cerdicings – as well as the *longue durée* of its historical range.

The case of the poetry is merely one of the vast differences between these two major strands of the Chronicle tradition, but it illustrates some of the ways in which the Northern Recension questions the historiographical narratives of the southern manuscripts. In this northern Chronicle, readers learn far more about events along the border with Scotland, the deaths of leaders and churchmen not necessarily descended from Cerdic, and detailed accounts of interactions between southern monarchs and northern territories – content

largely ignored by the Common Stock and the southern manuscripts. The Scandinavian and Celtic influences of northern England have a much stronger presence in this Chronicle, and events in the north play a decisive role in how the story of English history unfolds. It comes as no surprise that these texts have an overwhelmingly northern focus; recourse to Bede and to the Northumbrian annals expands the range of this Chronicle's interest well beyond the borders of Wessex. Some of these sources, such as the Northumbrian annals, do not survive, and their existence can only be extrapolated from texts like the Chronicle's Northern Recension. But they show that there was a strong tradition of annal-writing in the north as well as the south during the early medieval period, and that this tradition offered both events and interpretations distinct from the narrative of Cerdicing hegemony that dominates the southern Chronicle.

As Thomas Bredehoft has argued, however, 'our familiar name for the Northern Chronicle obscures the degree to which it stands as the beginning of a more comprehensively national chronicle: rather than replacing the West Saxon focus with a northern focus, the Northern Recension supplements the Chronicle's West Saxon perspective through the addition of northern material'.[39] Or, as Stephen Baxter puts it, 'Annalistic writing and factional politics were therefore closely connected in mid-eleventh-century England.'[40] The northern manuscripts do not simply displace one monolithic version of history with another. Instead, the northern additions act as a supplement to the original Cerdicing narrative, fleshing out the larger picture and making space, as Nennius did, for multiple points of view. Paradoxically (to the nationalist historians of the nineteenth century), as the Chronicle becomes more national, it also becomes more diverse. As Bredehoft points out, MSS D and E omit many of the Cerdicing genealogies that occur so frequently in the pre-890 annals.[41] We saw above that a quick reminder of a new monarch's descent from Cerdic helped to sustain a sense of continuity and hegemony in the Common Stock tradition. But by the time that E was copied in the early twelfth century, even Æthelwulf's extensive genealogy s.a. 855 was apparently considered irrelevant, and the scribe left it out. For the writers (and presumably the readers) of these northern manuscripts, English history was no longer a family affair. It had extended to include those who did not consider themselves closely connected to that Wessex dynasty, either through blood or through allegiance.

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39 Bredehoft, *Textual Histories*, p. 68.
40 Baxter, 'MS C of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', p. 1190.
41 Bredehoft, *Textual Histories*, pp. 69–70.

Another symptom of the new, national focus of the northern Chronicle is the geographical preface, found in both MS D and MS E, which describes the situation of the island as a whole: 'Brytene igland is ehta hund mila lang ⁊ twa hund mila brad, ⁊ her synd on þam iglande fif geþeodu, Ænglisc, Brytwylsc, Scottysc, Pihttisc ⁊ Boclæden' [The island of Britain is eight hundred miles long and two hundred miles across, and there are in the island five languages, English, British, Scottish, Pictish and Latin].[42] England in this Chronicle is conceived of as the island in its entirety, and the Chronicle claims to speak for the history of the whole island – not just one dynasty. This preface is drawn from Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*,[43] and it also reproduces Bede's description of how the Britons came from Armenia and settled in the southern part of the island, while the Picts from Scythia settled in the north.[44] Even the Scots colonized parts of the island from their base in Ireland. The Celts, this Chronicle tells us, were the first inhabitants of the island, and they were followed by the Romans, long before any Anglo-Saxons set foot on its shores. In the annals that follow, the narrative of Cerdicing glory has been omitted, and the story of the arrival of the Germanic tribes is supplemented by details about events taking place on the continent, and especially in Rome. This version of the Chronicle is much broader in focus, from the opening geographical preface to the details that supplement the Alfredian narrative, to its longevity, surviving far beyond the Norman Conquest to chronicle English history into the twelfth century.

It is difficult indeed to overstate the ideological contrast between the Northern Recension and the earlier manuscripts from which it is descended. But it is a testament to the enduring power of that original historical ideology to see its influence persisting in a tradition that spans what is often viewed as a decisive historical break at 1066. The English historical imaginary was able to flourish well beyond its origins because of its ability to refashion itself to meet the demands of changing historical circumstances. Whereas the earlier Chronicle chose the Cerdicing dynasty as the focal point for its elaboration of an English identity, the later versions of the Chronicle were forced to seek elsewhere for common ground on which to sketch a narrative arc. This search for a new focal point led eventually back to the same rubric under which Bede united the various kingdoms of an even earlier medieval England, and one

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42 Cubbin (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS D*, p. 1.

43 See above, p. 233.

44 The origins of the Picts remain a mystery to modern scholars; see Alcock, *Arthur's Britain*, pp. 270–7. On attitudes towards the North in Anglo-Saxon historical sources, see A. Woolf, 'Reporting Scotland'.

which could, with little difficulty, bridge even the divide of the Norman Conquest: the idea of the Christian nation.

Histories after the Norman Conquest

As we have seen, the version of history promoted by the Cerdicings in the late ninth and early tenth centuries did not survive the political upheaval in the latter part of the eleventh. Replacing it was the more flexible narrative, and the more global scope, of the northern histories. Coupled with the influence of sources like the *Historia Brittonum* and *Annales Cambriae*, which had been preserved and passed down by generations of English scribes, this new version of English history encouraged a vision of the island as a Christian nation with roots in a faith tradition that extended as far back as Roman habitation. This is not to say that earlier histories eschewed religious overtones; on the contrary, elements such as the *Death of Edgar* in the early Chronicle promote a deeply Christian notion of kingship, and Æthelweard's *Chronicon*, though heavily invested in family honour, roots itself firmly in the history of Creation. But these later histories forgo the heroic stories of warrior kings in favour of the longer arc of salvation history. The Celtic histories found new life as evidence of a strong Christianity on the island long before the arrival of the Augustinian mission in Kent in 597. The fact that these texts cast the recently conquered Anglo-Saxons as history's villains made it that much easier for Anglo-Norman historiographers to find points of continuity with the island's earlier inhabitants. As a result, the northern sources came to be used by the great Latin historians of the twelfth century, William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, thus intensifying the divide between the 'heroic history' of the pre-Conquest era and the more generalized, multivocal historiography that came after it.

The century and a half following the Norman Conquest saw tremendous political and cultural upheaval; the events of this era were some of the most turbulent in English history, and they naturally gave rise to new ideas about English identity. The claims of that identity would be broad and far-reaching; it had to at once justify Norman rule, incorporate a wide range of different customs, traditions and language groups, and establish 'Englishness' as a meaningful designation with its own ancient cultural inheritance. The Norman Conquest, after all, was an enterprise rooted in the legitimacy of inheritance, and cultural productions across the span of the twelfth century, especially the ambitious and monumental histories from this era, show evidence of various projects to assimilate pre-Conquest history into a unified 'English' framework. The history writers of Anglo-Norman England inherited not only the political

upheaval of 1066, which had disrupted and reorganized English cultural institutions, but also a people of mixed extraction, from Anglo-Saxons through Welsh and Danes to Normans, Irish and Scots, each with their own languages, traditions and customs.[45] In their quest to imagine new communities, these writers found a site of neutrality in the distant British past.

During this time, Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* remained an indispensable source for Insular history before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons, and Anglo-Norman writers paid homage to their venerable forebear.[46] Like Bede, Anglo-Norman historiographers offer the history of a people, the *Angli*; William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum* begins with an invocation to Bede, and Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum* borrows the opening *descriptio* of the island as the place to found its narrative, just as the Northern Recension of the Chronicle did. Of course, the *Angli* of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* are not the same *Angli* for whom William and Henry appropriate early Insular history; by adopting both their name and their history, however, the Anglo-Normans elide the distinctions between themselves and the conquered Insular peoples. At the same time, they effectively erase the historical impact of earlier rulers. The authoritative histories of Henry and William are honest attempts to represent the past responsibly, but they also have everything to do with a nationalist agenda of justification. In their versions of Insular history, the distinctions between the Anglo-Norman *Angli* and the Anglo-Saxon *Angli* dissolve to create the sense of a unified and unbroken historical inheritance, striving ultimately for the kind of monolithic cultural identity that underwrites the earlier Common Stock of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

Codifying this identity, and establishing its relationship to the peoples who preceded the new English as inhabitants of the island, became the task of the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman historiographers. Interest in the Anglo-Saxon past rose sharply in the early 1100s, as evidenced by the mammoth historical undertakings of writers like Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury and John of Worcester, who sought to incorporate pre-Conquest England into the narrative of Anglo-Norman history. To do so, they drew freely and frequently on the wide range of Insular histories available to them, including Bede, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the *Historia Brittonum*, the *Annales Cambriae*, historical poetry and many other texts such as the Mercian Register and the Northumbrian annals, now lost, that clearly lie behind both these texts and some of their earlier forebears. Written in the 1120s, William of Malmesbury's

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45 See Gransden, *Historical Writing*, pp. 136–65.
46 See R. Bartlett, *Norman and Angevin Kings*, p. 623, fig. 16; and Colgrave and Mynors, *HE*, pp. xlvi–lxiv.

popular *Gesta regum Anglorum* and *Gesta pontificum Anglorum* were early attempts at narrating a continuous history of the island from the *Adventus Saxonum* through to the reign of Henry I, but they also work to naturalize Norman rule of the formerly English island. William's prefatory letter to the Empress Matilda in the *Gesta regum Anglorum*, for example, emphasizes the connection of her mother's family to the kings of the West Saxons,[47] and he suggests modestly that his work was undertaken because of 'patriae caritatem' [love of my country] and a desire to 'interruptam temporum seriem sarcire et exarata barbarice Romano sale condire' [to mend the broken chain of our history, and give a Roman polish to the rough annals of our native speech].[48] Henry's *Historia Anglorum*, written at the behest of Bishop Alexander of Lincoln between 1129 and 1154, is an attempt to bring together a wide range of sources for English history from the arrival of the Britons to the coronation of Henry II. His primary source is a version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle closely related to MS E, but he also relies heavily on Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, and he incorporates material from the *Historia Brittonum*, other versions of the Chronicle, and several Old English poems, now lost, that must have been something like the odes of *Brunanburh* and *The Capture of the Five Boroughs*.[49] Throughout, Henry attempts to educate his audience on peace, unity and Christian forbearance, and to make the history of the island a common history for readers from various walks of life. Perhaps the most ambitious of these undertakings, however, is the *Chronicle* of John of Worcester, a work designed to incorporate the historical details of early medieval England into a universal, or world, history – a continuation, in some ways, of the work begun by the Old English translator of Orosius during the reign of Alfred.[50] John's *Chronicle* begins with the creation of the world and takes the reader up to 1140, focusing more and more on events in England as his sources become more detailed.

These three authors share a common sense of the narrative arc of Insular history, drawn more from the likes of Bede and Nennius than from the pro-Cerdicing Chronicle of the tenth century. All three demonstrate a commitment to smooth historical narrative, reaching explicitly back to Bede for a model of Latin historiography, and providing full narrative and interpretive explanation even where their sources offer only brief notation and little or no analysis. And all three value accuracy and good writing; William, perhaps, is most scathing in his condemnation of earlier English historians:

47 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, vol. 1, pp. 6–7.
48 *Ibid.*, p. 14 (trans. p. 15).
49 Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, pp. lxxxv–cvii.
50 See above, p. 233.

post eum [Bede] non facile, ut arbitror, reperies qui historiis illius gentis Latina oratione texendis animum dederit . . . Sunt sane quaedam uetustatis inditia cronico more et patrio sermone per annos Domini ordinata. Per haec senium obliuionis eluctari meruerunt quaecumque tempora post illum uirum fluxerunt. Nam de Elwardo, illustri et magnifico uiro, qui Cronica illa Latine aggressus est digerere, prestat silere, cuius michi esset intentio animo si non essent uerba fastidio.

[After Bede you will not easily, I think, find anyone who has devoted himself to writing English history in Latin . . . There are, it is true, some records in the form of annals in the mother tongue, arranged in order of date; and thanks to these the period since Bede has contrived to escape the dotage of oblivion. As for Æthelweard, a distinguished figure, who essayed an edition of these Chronicles in Latin, the less said of him the better; I would approve his intention, did I not find his language distasteful.][51]

William has no great respect for the work of those early English chroniclers, although he is content to mine their work for the historical detail that is missing between the death of Bede and his own time. With this view of their English predecessors, it is easy to see why these Anglo-Norman historians are more invested, both politically and aesthetically, in the Latin models set by writers like Bede, and why they would eschew the politically charged aesthetics of the vernacular Chronicles.

One reason for the assimilation of Insular historiography is once again to replace the chaos of political history with the appearance of a smooth, orderly progression of events, just as the first chronicler of the Common Stock tried to do. In addition, Norman claims to legitimacy were based on the belief, first advanced as propaganda by William of Jumièges,[52] that Edward the Confessor had designated William of Normandy as his heir before his death, and that Harold himself had sworn an oath of fealty to William well before 1066. Such claims gained ground as they were popularized by other historians, such as William of Poitiers in his *Gesta Guillelmi* and Guy, bishop of Amiens, the author of the *Carmen de Hastingae proelio*, and they also informed the narrative of the Bayeux Tapestry.[53] This version of history paints Harold as a usurper, justifies the Norman Conquest, and posits William's line as the rightful heirs to the English throne. Adopting the history of the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons as their own similarly bolsters Norman claims to an Insular cultural inheritance. In pragmatic terms, writing themselves into the history of the island allows those

51 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, vol. 1, p. 14 (trans. p. 15).
52 Van Houts (ed. and trans.), *Gesta Normannorum ducum*.
53 See Gameson, 'Bayeux Tapestry'.

of Norman descent to become as English as the people whose families had lived there since before 1066, despite the ethnic and political differences which otherwise separate them, and the past becomes another touchstone for a unified Anglo-Norman identity.

But Anglo-Normans were not the only ones writing in the shadow of the Conquest. As we have seen with the later versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, English-language writers too were searching for a more universal rubric under which to gather the various strands of Insular history. One such writer is the author of the late Old English poem *Durham*, written in the first decade of the twelfth century and generally considered to be the latest surviving example of Old English alliterative verse.[54] The twenty-one-line poem commemorates the city of Durham as the repository of some of the most important relics of English Christendom, dating back to the glory days of Northumbrian Christianity in the age of Bede. Instead of envisioning Germanic warriors as icons of English identity, the poet names the early Northumbrian monks whose 'unarimeda reliquia' [19; countless relics] inhabit Durham Cathedral: the incorrupt St Cuthbert, the martyr King Oswald, the bishops Aidan and Æthelwold, Eadberht and Eadfrith, and Bede and Boisil. The power of this impressive list, however, lies primarily in its antiquity: the holy men named are all figures from the earliest days of Northumbrian (and hence English) Christianity. According to the poem, the city of Durham is 'breome geond Breotenrice' [1; famous throughout the kingdom of Britain] because it is the place where people can visit the relics of saints long dead. In this way, *Durham* argues for the importance of the cathedral community's connection to its English past even as that community enters a new, Norman-built church. Scholars have long recognized the poem's propagandistic bent; it promotes, as Nicholas Howe has written, 'the city of Durham as a site that holds the landscape and the history of the Anglo-Saxons against the forces of temporal loss and change'.[55] The saints' relics in Durham Cathedral, particularly the incorruptible body of Cuthbert, testify to both the continuity and the antiquity of English Christianity.

It is worth noting that the *Durham* poet reaches for a connection with an Anglo-Saxon past that predates the political heyday of the Cerdicings of Wessex, that dynasty whose consciously choreographed historical image depends heavily on its Germanic inheritance. The England of Bede and Cuthbert signifies a pristine Christian kingdom, as yet unmolested by centuries of attack from heathen Vikings, an image reinforced by the pristine state

54 Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, p. 27; on the poem's date, see pp. xliii–xlv. See also Lerer, 'Old English and Its Afterlife'.
55 N. Howe, *Writing the Map*, p. 225.

of Cuthbert's relics. Similarly, the deliberately archaic use of 'Breotonrice' to denote the kingdom passes over the work of Anglo-Saxon nation-building in the tenth and eleventh centuries which resulted in the creation of 'Englalond', the kingdom subsequently conquered by the Normans.[56] Germanic cultural identity, in the form of Anglo-Saxon kingship, was defeated at Hastings; by situating the roots of a Christian cultural identity in the distant past, the poet of *Durham* is able to sidestep the requirements of linear temporality and avoid consideration of a more recent cultural trauma. Most importantly, the poet praises English saints whose bodies lie in a church built by the Normans, countering the Norman expression of political power with an English assertion of religious primacy. *Durham*, as Joseph Grossi has more recently argued, 'is fundamentally about devout custodianship', and such custodianship encompassed not only the relics of early English saints, but also the historical texts – of Bede, Nennius, and the like – that travelled with the poem and its companion piece, Symeon of Durham's *Historia Dunelmensis ecclesiae*.[57] Yet, like both the Anglo-Norman histories with which it is contemporary, and the now defunct Cerdicing hegemony that preceded it, *Durham*'s striving for continuity is itself enough to indicate, paradoxically, how different the present is from the past it attempts to channel.

The task of the historian in post-Conquest England was to preserve knowledge of the past and to pass it on to future generations. This is precisely what the poet of *Durham*, the scribes of the later Chronicle manuscripts, William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon and John of Worcester saw themselves as doing. Yet this is precisely what the annalists of the early Chronicle manuscripts, the poets of *Brunanburh* and *Maldon*, the compilers of the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae*, and any number of other early medieval English historiographers felt to be their task as well. In each age, the writers of English history have felt the mandate to shape both present and future ideas about how and why the past holds meaning, and every text sets forth a narrative arc that attempts to make sense of the whole. The fact that each transmits a different set of ideas of the past only reinforces our mandate to read widely among the histories of early medieval England, and to recognize that they are as many and varied as any other form of literary production.

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56 On the importance of 'Englalond' as a political concept, see Wormald, '*Engla Lond*'; and Foot, 'Making of Angelcynn'.

57 The manuscript that contained these works was subsequently divided into two codices, now Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.i.27 and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 66; see Grossi, 'Preserving the Future'.

Chapter 10

The literary languages of Old English: words, styles, voices

JOSHUA DAVIES

> Neque enim possunt carmina, quamuis optime conposita, ex alia in aliam linguam at uerbum sine detrimento sui decoris ac dignitatis transferri.
>
> *HE*, IV. 24

> For it is not possible to translate verse, however well composed, literally from one language to another without some loss of beauty and dignity.

Along with the Alfredian aphorism 'hwilum word be worde, hwilum andgit of andgiete' [sometimes word for word, sometimes sense for sense] and Ælfric's comments in the preface to his translation of Genesis, the passage from Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* quoted above is one of the most well-known Anglo-Saxon meditations on the problems and possibilities of translation.[1] What is remarkable about Bede's phrase is not the concern for the integrity of words that it expresses, but the respect it bestows on the vernacular language. Although he advocated translating certain Christian works such as the Pater Noster from Latin into Old English,[2] and according to Cuthbert was working on his own translation of the Gospel of St John at his deathbed,[3] in the *Historia ecclesiastica*, even though he took the trouble to list them, Bede gave the vernacular languages of early medieval Britain and Ireland short shrift.[4] Here, however, he indicates that the language we now know as Old English might be capable of great artistry and power. Bede also makes a wider point, which isn't actually about translation at all but about how languages function. The loss of

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1 See Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, vol. I, p. 7, and, for Ælfric's preface to Genesis, Crawford (ed.), *Old English Version of the Heptateuch*, pp. 76–80. See also Stanton, *Culture of Translation* and Rowley, *Old English Bede*, pp. 6–7.
2 Bede, 'Epistola ad Ecgbertum episcopum', in *Opera historica*, pp. 405–23 (p. 409). See M. Brown, 'Bede's Life in Context'.
3 'Cuthbert's Letter on the Death of Bede', in *HE*, pp. 580–7.
4 See A. Hall, 'Interlinguistic Communication'.

'decoris ac dignitatis' feared by Bede is due to the different ways in which Latin and Old English function as systems of signification. 'Words', as Jeremy Smith has put it, 'are defined by their relationship with other words.'[5] The words of a particular language are defined by their context, discourse and delivery. They play off one another to define one another's semantic fields and create meanings. And, as Bede recognized, these meanings are always in process rather than fixed and stable. Bede's concern for the manner in which words generate meanings marks one of the major subjects of this chapter. While I will explore the origins and development of the dialects collectively known as Old English, the greater part of this chapter will concentrate on language usage: what culturally and historically specific meanings the words of the language had and what uses Anglo-Saxon authors put these words to.

Roots and branches

The text at the root of Bede's concern for 'decoris ac dignitatis' was Cædmon's *Hymn*, the short religious poem that he tells us was composed by a divinely inspired farm worker at St Hild's monastery in Streanæshalch, now conventionally identified with Whitby. The story Bede tells of Cædmon's *Hymn*, like the poem itself, can be read as signalling the transformations that might be initiated by an encounter between the language of a pre-Christian, heathen people and the divine grace of Christian belief. But the narrative can also be read as an acknowledgement by Bede of the sophistication of the vernacular literary tradition. His anxiety can be seen to gesture simultaneously towards both the elevated lexis of poetry and the interconnectedness of language and culture. Not only was Cædmon able to compose beautiful verses in praise of God in his own language, but these praises were sung in a particularly Northumbrian, Anglian or English style, a style that Bede felt unable to replicate in Latin.

The two earliest Old English versions of the *Hymn* survive as additions to eighth-century Latin manuscripts of the *Historia ecclesiastica*. One is inscribed at the end of the *Historia* in Cambridge, University Library, MS Kk. 5. 16. This manuscript is known as 'The Moore Bede' and has been dated to 737.[6] The other copy is inscribed below the account of the Cædmon episode in St Petersburg, National Library of Russia, MS Lat. Q. v. I. 18, which is known as 'The St Petersburg Bede' and has been dated to some point shortly before 747.[7] These two poems represent the earliest extant European vernacular

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5 J. J. Smith, *Historical Study of English*, p. 116.
6 Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 25, p. 38.
7 *Ibid.*, no. 122, p. 158, named 'Leningrad, Public Library, MS Lat. Q. v. I. 18'.

poetry and were read and copied throughout the continent across the Middle Ages. Both are written in a Northumbrian dialect of Old English that is attested by other early northern works such as the earliest manuscript copies of *Bede's Death Song* and the Leiden Riddle, as well as the runic inscription on the Franks Casket and later works such as the glosses to the Lindisfarne Gospels.[8] In total the *Hymn* is traceable to twenty-one medieval witnesses, dated from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries.[9] The texts can be divided into two dialectal groups, Northumbrian and West Saxon, although copying traditions do not correlate with this division. The tradition is defined by two main recensions, known as the 'aelda' and 'eorða' recensions, although the two earliest texts each belong to a different branch: the common root no longer exists.[10] So the multiple copies of the *Hymn*, their familial resemblances and unique qualities, remind us that our knowledge of the Old English language, as represented in the surviving corpus of Anglo-Saxon vernacular literature, is partial. Our investigations of the languages of Old English literature are based on fragments of a rich and diverse literary culture, and these fragments themselves maintain only a trace of the language as it might have been spoken.

The story of the transmission of Cædmon's *Hymn* is a story of the change and development of the Old English language. Of great linguistic and cultural significance, it reveals some of the fluidity and complexity of the social world of early medieval Britain. Just as Bede felt he was unable to successfully transfer the 'decoris ac dignitatis' of Cædmon's words into Latin, so too many of the differences among the Old English texts of the *Hymn* are impossible to replicate in Modern English translation. This is significant. These variations illustrate not only the reception history of the poem but also the development of and the differences among the dialects collectively known as Old English and the communities involved in the production of the texts. The languages of the different copies of Cædmon's poem elucidate a series of cultural encounters, first of all between the Insular Anglo-Saxon and Christian cultural traditions, and later between Anglo-Saxons of the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries and earlier communities. Metrically, stylistically and linguistically, Cædmon's *Hymn* purposefully and thoroughly engages with

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8 On dialect, see A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, pp. 4–12; and Toon, 'Old English Dialects'.

9 See O'Donnell (ed.), *Cædmon's 'Hymn'*, pp. 78–98; and Cavill, 'Bede and Cædmon's Hymn', and 'Manuscripts of Cædmon's Hymn'.

10 See O'Donnell (ed.), *Cædmon's 'Hymn'*, pp. 119–31; and S. Irvine, 'Beginnings and Transitions', esp. pp. 37–40.

Germanic traditions. However, the *Hymn* adapts the poetic form and idiom of this culture to suit its Christian material. While the *Hymn* has often been regarded as an origin of vernacular Anglo-Saxon literary culture, the linguistic, orthographic, critical and palaeographic evidence suggests that it might be better, although more prosaically, understood as a point in an already ongoing process, a nexus between traditions.[11]

In the nine lines of the *Hymn* six different synonyms are used for God: 'hefenrıcæs uard' [guardian of the kingdom of heaven], 'uuldurfadur' [father of glory], 'ecıdryctın' [eternal lord], 'halıg sceppend' [holy creator], 'moncynnæs uard' [mankind's guardian] and 'freaallmehtıg' [lord almighty].[12] This last form is of particular importance as it brings together two words of very different provenance. 'Frea' is etymologically related to the Germanic goddess Frijjō (who is also at the root of 'Friday') but its qualifier, 'allmehtıg', seems to be a loan formation from Latin that entered the vernacular with the introduction of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon culture.[13] The words 'uard' (an early form of *weard*) and 'dryctın', like 'frea', are drawn from cognate Germanic languages and in Old English were able to signify both earthly and heavenly guardians and lords. Unlike 'allmehtıg', these are Germanic words turned over to signify a Christian concept.

The *Hymn*'s use of 'ecıdryctin' [eternal lord] is the earliest attestation of the form in Old English or any of its related languages.[14] Later forms of *dryctın* (*dryhtin*, *dryhten*, *drihten*) were used in both secular and religious texts written in all the dialects of Old English, and this reveals not just the transformation the new religion worked upon the language, but also the composition of the Christian cultures of early England. An alternative form, *dryhtnæs*, was part of a now lost inscription on the Bewcastle Monument,[15] while later attestations include the Vespasian Glosses, in which 'Dominus inluminatio mea' is glossed as 'Dryhten inlihtnis mine' [the Lord is my light].[16] Both meanings of the word are used in *Beowulf*, *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *The Wanderer*. *Dryctın* is related to the Old Norse *drottin* and the Old High German *truhtin*, and was later used in such canonical texts as *Gawain and the Green Knight* and Malory's

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11 See O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*, pp. 23–47; Frantzen, *Desire for Origins*, pp. 130–67; Orchard, 'Word Made Flesh'; and Stanton, *Culture of Translation*, pp. 116–17. On the example of 'modgidanc', see Hogg, 'Phonology and Morphology', pp. 76–7.

12 Text taken from transcription of the Moore Bede in O'Donnell (ed.), *Cædmon's 'Hymn'*, p. 222. The poem is not lineated in this edition. All translations from Old English are my own unless stated.

13 See Sauer, 'Language and Culture', p. 451.

14 See Stanley, 'New Formulas for Old'; also Fulk, 'English as a Germanic Language'.

15 On the lost inscription, see Page, 'Bewcastle Cross'.

16 Kuhn (ed.), *Vespasian Psalter*, p. 22.

Morte d'Arthur before falling out of use around 1450. *Frea* is another common word in Old English literature, appearing in ninety texts, but unlike *dryhten* is used almost exclusively in poetic works.[17]

These examples demonstrate not only the cultural construction of language and literature, but the linguistic construction of a culture – how language simultaneously describes and makes the world. This is seen most clearly in later usages. The particularly Anglo-Saxon sense of Christian identity and community displayed in Old English texts such as *The Seafarer* and *The Dream of the Rood* is conditioned by the weight these and similar words carry. For instance, in *Judith*, while Holofernes, the monstrous would-be tormentor of the virginal warrior-like heroine, is described as 'egesful eorla dryhten' [21; lord of awful warriors], the day is saved for the Hebrews when 'him feng Dryhten God / fægre on fultum, frea ælmihtig' [299–300; The Lord God, the almighty Lord, had come swiftly to their aid].[18] The capitalization is editorial and serves to make explicit a difference in meaning that would have been implicit in the original. These examples justify Bede's caution. No dignity or beauty is lost, but new meanings are generated with every linguistic expression.

Languages in, of and out of place

Although Bede did not see Old English as an equal to Latin, in the century following the completion of the *Historia ecclesiastica* changes in the social, religious and political cultures of Anglo-Saxon England caused the vernacular language to gain prestige: the vernacular began to be used more commonly for official documents and Latin works began to be translated into Old English (as explored in Chapter 8 above). Sensibly, the translator (or translators) responsible for rendering the *Historia* into Old English at the end of the ninth or the beginning of the tenth century omitted Bede's fretful proviso. The Old English Bede proceeds smoothly from Cædmon's vision to his song. This is just one example of the translator's keenness to reach for the editorial scissors: Bede's detailed account of the Synod of Whitby on the dating of Easter, many papal letters and various excursions on etymology, geography and theology were also excised. The cuts were clearly not made with only brevity in mind, however, as they narrowed the focus of Bede's work to

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17 See D. H. Green, *Carolingian Lord*. All information about Old English usage is derived from searches of the University of Toronto's *DOE* Corpus.

18 Dobbie (ed.), *Beowulf and Judith*, pp. 99–113 (pp. 99, 107).

produce a text particularly relevant to an Anglo-Saxon audience of the ninth and tenth centuries.[19]

Two copies of the Old English Bede survive from the tenth century and a further three survive from the eleventh.[20] Three extracts are preserved on a single leaf of the late ninth- or early tenth-century manuscript London, British Library, MS Cotton Domitian ix.[21] Post-Conquest library catalogues of Burton-on-Trent, Christ Church Canterbury and Durham all list copies of the work that are now lost, and demonstrate that the work was widely copied. Although all the surviving texts of the Old English Bede are West Saxon productions, each contains earlier linguistic elements of Anglian character, and this suggests that the surviving copies share a common root which was itself a West Saxon copy of an earlier Mercian work.[22] It is therefore impossible to locate the composition of the Old English Bede within its original cultural moment, but by the late tenth century its importance was well established. When Ælfric wrote that the *Historia ecclesiastica* had been 'of Ledene on Englisc awende' [translated from Latin into English] by King Alfred, he demonstrated both his own access to the work (although he indicated that it was not widely available) and its cultural esteem.[23] It is tempting to read the Old English Bede, with Ælfric, as practically or at least symbolically attached to the Alfredian programme of educational reforms and therefore a unit in the grander scheme of the development of an Anglo-Saxon nation. The linguistic evidence disrupts this satisfying narrative, however, to reveal a more fluid and complex circumstance.

Some of this complexity is reflected in the occasionally Latinate syntax of the Old English Bede and the tendency of the translator to use two Old English words to translate one Latin word.[24] But at points the translation is not afraid to diverge from Bede's Latin. To take a brief example from the Cædmon episode, where Bede's text has the angel reply to Cædmon that 'At tamen ait mihi cantare

19 See Whitelock, 'Old English Bede'; Molyneaux, 'English Ideology or Christian Instruction?'; Szarmach, 'Poetic Turn of Mind'; Rowley, 'Bede in Later Anglo-Saxon England' and *Old English Bede*; and Fry, 'Bede'.

20 The manuscripts are Cambridge, University Library, MS Kk. 3 18 (Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 23, pp. 36–7); Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 41 (Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 32, pp. 43–6); London, British Library, MS Cotton Otho B. xi, (Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 180, pp. 230–4); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 10 (Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 351, pp. 428–9); Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 279 (Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 354, pp. 432–3).

21 Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 151, pp. 188–9.

22 See J. J. Campbell, 'Dialect Vocabulary'; Miller (ed. and trans.), *Old English Bede*; and Grant, *B Text of the Old English Bede*.

23 In his Life of St Gregory the Great; see Ælfric, *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, pp. 72–80 (p. 72), lines 7–8.

24 See Discenza, 'Old English *Bede*'; and S. Kuhn, 'Synonyms in the Old English Bede'.

habes' [But nevertheless you have to sing to me],[25] the Old English has 'Hwæðre þu meaht singan' [However, you might sing].[26] This is a subtle but nevertheless revealing alteration. While Cædmon is instructed in the Latin, he is encouraged in the Old English. Might this, like Bede's concern over the accuracy of his paraphrase, be an acknowledgement of the cultural significance of vernacular poetry, or possibly evidence of the day-to-day use of English in the monasteries for instruction? This view is perhaps confirmed by another minor yet suggestive alteration made earlier in the scene. Where Bede's original has 'Et quidem et alii post illum in gente Anglorum religiosa poemata facere temtabant, sed nullus eum aequiperare potuit' [*HE*, iv.24, pp. 414–15; It is true that after him other Englishmen attempted to compose religious poems, but none could compare with him], the Old English translation has 'Ond eac swelce monige ore æfter him in Ongeþeode ongunnon æfeste leo wyrcan: ac nænig hwæðre him þæt gelice don meahte' [And also many others after him in England began to compose pious songs: none however could do that like him].[27] Again, there is a shift of meaning from Bede's dismissal of post-Cædmon Old English poetry to the translation's sense of a continuing, albeit diminished tradition. While 'ongunnon' did carry the sense of 'temtabant' (from which Modern English 'attempted' is derived), its most common meaning was closer to 'began' than 'attempted'.[28] In this particular context, 'began' is clearly the meaning that the translator intended and there is a much clearer sense of an Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition in the translation, right from 'Ond' at the beginning of the sentence. 'Ongunnon' is used earlier in the translation to convey the sense of 'temtabant' as it does here, but the context is very different and the passage is on the whole much closer to the Latin.[29] A more accurate option could have been derived from 'cunnian', which the Toronto *DOE* and Bosworth-Toller dictionary define as 'to try, to attempt'.[30] An eighth-century Latin copy of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* in London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius C. ii includes a number of ninth-century Old English glosses and among them 'temptabant' is glossed with 'cunnadan'.[31] To return to my earlier point, what is important is not the dignity

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25 Colgrave and Mynors translate as 'Nevertheless you must sing to me' (*HE*, iv.24, pp. 416–17).

26 Miller (ed. and trans.), *Old English Bede*, iv.24, pp. 342–3.

27 *Ibid*.

28 See Bosworth-Toller, *s.v.* on-ginnan, p. 752.

29 Miller (ed. and trans.), *Old English Bede*, iii.13, pp. 200–1. On this passage see St-Jacques, 'Hwilum word be word', p. 99.

30 Bosworth-Toller, p. 174.

31 Meritt (ed.), *Old English Glosses*, p. 8. The manuscript is Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 198 and *CLA*, 191. See also Colgrave and Mynors in *HE*, p. xlii.

or beauty that may have been lost in this act of translation, but the new linguistic, historical and cultural meanings that the translation generates.

Language contacts and contexts

Language use was one of the key indicators of regional, national and social identity in medieval Europe.[32] Bede provides one early example of the role language played in establishing class-based identities in Anglo-Saxon England in his story of Imma. Imma was a Northumbrian nobleman taken hostage by Mercians and Bede reports that, while he was held, Imma tried to persuade his captors that he was of low birth but failed because his appearance, bearing and speech revealed his true social position.[33] Another example of language contact is provided by the Old English translation of Orosius' *History against the Pagans*, in which two 'reports' from seafarers are incorporated, less than seamlessly, as eye-witness accounts of the northern world in the opening chapter. What is notable about the famous example of Ohthere and Wulfstan, however, is the ease with which the linguistic differences are navigated.[34] As Russell Poole points out in Chapter 23 below, the account suggests familiarity between the linguistic communities of England and Scandinavia. Poole also explores the Scandinavian influence on the Old English *Battle of Maldon*, which records a comprehensive English defeat by a Danish army in 991 and presents a number of powerful examples of the integration of Norse-derived items in Old English dialects.[35] Famously, even the location of Hild's monastery which housed Cædmon, named Streanæshalch by Bede, altered over time to become, by the compilation of Domesday Book, Whitby, a word of Norse origin that signifies the impact and lasting influence of the Scandinavian communities that settled there in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries.[36]

The eighth-century hagiography of St Guthlac, the Mercian nobleman and warrior who committed to life as a fenland hermit, provides further insight into Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards language, culture and identity and the Christian cultures of early Anglo-Saxon England. The Latin Life of the saint was composed by an otherwise unattested author named Felix and has been dated to *c.* 740. This text was the basis for four surviving Old English works, a prose translation in London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian D. xxi, a

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32 See, e.g., R. Bartlett, *Making of Europe*, pp. 198–204.
33 *HE*, IV.22, pp. 400–5. On the Imma episode, see Hines, 'Changes and Exchanges'.
34 Bately (ed.), *Old English Orosius*, pp. lxxi–lxxii.
35 See Pons-Sanz, 'Norse-Derived Terms', p. 444.
36 Townend, *Language and History*, p. 49. See also Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement Names*, p. 4.

Vercelli homily and the two Exeter Book poems, *Guthlac A* and *B*. Jane Roberts has concluded that the vocabulary of both the homily and the Vespasian text suggests that they ultimately derive from an Old English prose Guthlac text, itself based on Felix's *Life*, that 'was a non-West-Saxon translation made at a time not late in the tenth century'.[37] But once again, the Guthlac texts shed light on the cultural significance of language in the formation and mainten- ance of communities, as well as the historical study of them.

Chapter 34 of Felix's *Life* reports that one night while Guthlac was sleeping, devils approached his dwelling-place determined to torment and corrupt him. Guthlac awoke and realized from their 'strimulentas loquelas' [sibilant speech][38] that they were Britons, the 'infesti hostes Saxonici generis' [the implacable enemies of the Saxon race].[39] Revealingly, in the Old English prose translation the devils' language is considered to be of such importance that the chapter is titled 'Hu þa deofla on brytisc spræcon' [How the devils spoke in British].[40] Guthlac's own fluency in 'brytisc' is explained by Felix to be a result of the time the saint spent in exile among them as a young man, but it is clear that neither the Britons nor their language are shown in a positive light by the association.[41] It is also clear, however, that 'brytisc' was under- stood by Guthlac, and presumably at least recognized if not understood by the readers or listeners of this *Life*. What is also worth remarking upon is the fact that it was socially acceptable, and very common, for members of elite families to spend time in exile with members of different ethnic groups.[42] Considered in this context, the *Life* can be seen as creating rather than reflecting ethnic tensions. Moreover, while the association of 'brytisc' with the devils is clearly important, the unspoken association between Old English (the language that is *not* spoken by the Britons) and Latin is similarly signifi- cant. The episodes are not simply concerned with testing the cultural bound- aries that separate 'brytisc' from Latin and Old English, but with establishing a cultural connection between Old English and Latin.

The power of language to transform and constitute identities, bodies and communities is made clear not just by the emphasis placed on the language of

37 J. Roberts, 'Old English Prose Translation', p. 369. See also Bately, 'Old English Prose'.
38 Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *Felix's Life* of *St Guthlac*, pp. 110–11.
39 *Ibid.*, pp. 108–9.
40 Gonser (ed.), *Prosa-Leben des hl. Guthlac*, p. 135. See also Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, p. 143; and J. Roberts, 'Old English Prose Translation', p. 365.
41 A. Hall, 'Interlinguistic Communication', p. 65. On 'British' and 'Brittonic', see Parsons, 'Sabrina in the Thorns'; and the papers collected as Part II of Higham (ed.), *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 165–245.
42 See Fleming, *Britain After Rome*, pp. 115–17; and Ó Cróinín, *Kings Depart*.

the devils, but also by Guthlac's reaction to them. Guthlac disperses the demons by reciting Psalm 67 (68 in the King James version), *Exsurgat Deus*. Felix, in a phrase that echoes the second verse of the psalm, and which is carefully translated in the Old English, writes that the devils disperse 'velut fumus' [like smoke, which becomes 'swa swa smic' in the translation] from his presence.[43] The text's faith in the power of scriptural words re-emerges in chapter 49 when Guthlac again recites a scriptural passage, this time from Numbers 10:35 – which is closely related to Psalm 67 – to Æthelbald, the king of Mercia, who visits him for spiritual guidance. The discovery of the Staffordshire Hoard in 2009 reveals further significance in these episodes. Among the six kilograms of gold and silver discovered in what was once the heart of the Mercian kingdom, Object 550 is a strip of gold alloy measuring 179 mm in length that was once probably attached to a shield, helmet or sword-hilt but is now loose and folded in half on itself. The object is inscribed with Latin text on either side of it, and these two inscriptions appear to be scriptural citations from those texts used by Guthlac to disperse the devils and reassure Æthelbald.[44] Object 550 therefore provides important contextual evidence that these scriptural passages were known in eighth-century Mercia. It also demonstrates that the language of Scripture had a life, and a power, outside religious foundations and that it was an essential element in the construction of Christian Anglo-Saxon identities.

Felix's faith in the power of words is maintained in the vernacular versions of his life of Guthlac. As Jane Roberts demonstrates, *Guthlac A* uses two groups of specialized vocabulary 'not general' in Old English verse, which differentiates it from *Guthlac B*.[45] *Guthlac A*'s vocabulary items concerned with legal and religious matters are noteworthy not only because of their rarity in verse, but because of their relevance to the poem's broader themes and cultural contexts. The description of the mound that Guthlac made his home contains two of the words that Roberts identifies as specialized legal terminology:

> Stod seo dygle stow   dryhtne in gemyndum
> idel ⁊ æmen,   eþelriehte feor,
> bád bisæce   betran hyrdes.[46]

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43 Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *Felix's Life of St Guthlac*, pp. 110–11; Gonser, *Prosa-Leben des hl. Guthlac*, p. 137.

44 See Geake (ed.), *Staffordshire Hoard Symposium*, particularly the contributions by Michelle Brown, David Ganz and Elizabeth Okasha.

45 J. Roberts (ed.), *Guthlac Poems*, p. 50.

46 *Ibid.*, *Guthlac A*, lines 215–17.

[The undiscovered place stood known to the Lord, but empty and unin-
habited, far from ancestral domain, awaited the dispute of better guardians.]

The use of 'eþelriehte' here to designate 'ancestral domain' is mirrored by the
Exodus poet's use of 'eðelrihtes' (at line 211) to refer to the Promised Land.[47]
The other significant word is 'bisæce' which Roberts identified as related to
the adjective *bisæc* [disputed, contested], used by Wulfstan in the Canons of
Edgar, and *unbesacen* [unmolested by litigation, uncontested], which appears
in six laws and charters.[48] These word choices reveal a concern with the
possession and occupation of land but also illustrate the interconnections in
this poem between land, identity, authority and language. This reading
chimes with Alfred Siewers' suggestion that the Guthlac texts should be
understood within a Mercian political context defined by the political elite's
attempt to establish Anglo-Saxon hegemony against native British citizens.[49]
This preoccupation infuses the poem's language, and what is particularly
noteworthy about this passage is the manner in which the past and future of
Guthlac's mound are conjured by the phrase that explains the saint's arrival:
the comparative adjective 'betran' undercuts the poem's earlier claim that the
place was uninhabited. It is significant, too, that 'stow' is used – a word that
not only designated a domestic dwelling but also a religious foundation – to
again rewrite the place's past from the perspective of the future. The language
transforms the landscape as Guthlac himself is transformed by his commit-
ment to the language of Scripture.

Defining words, identifying communities

A number of specialized vocabularies existed in Old English in the areas of
law, religion, poetry, science, astronomy and medicine, but perhaps the most
significant is that group of words known as the 'Winchester vocabulary'. This
designates a group of words used in preference to their synonyms by writers
with some connection to the New Minster at Winchester in the late tenth or
early eleventh century and hence to what is often referred to as the
Benedictine Reforms. Winchester vocabulary is used by Ælfric, in the con-
tinuous interlinear gloss to the Lambeth Psalter, in the anonymous English
prose translation of the *Regularis concordia* and in the continuous interlinear

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47 In Krapp (ed.), *Junius Manuscript*, pp. 89–109 (p. 97).
48 J. Roberts (ed.), *Guthlac Poems*, pp. 137–8.
49 Siewers, 'Landscapes of Conversion'.

gloss to the *Regula S. Benedicti*.[50] Walter Hofstetter has identified thirteen semantic fields in which Winchester vocabulary operated, and their cultural import is clear. For instance, within the semantic field of the adjectival concept 'foreign', Winchester works were likely to prefer '(ge)alfremed', 'geælfremod' or 'ælfremedung' over alternatives such as 'fremde', 'uta(n)cund', 'afremdan', 'fremdian', 'fremedlacan' or 'afremdung'. With regard to the concepts expressed by the Latin term *ecclesia*, that is, 'the Catholic Church', Winchester works were likely to prefer '(ge)laðung' over alternatives such as 'cirice' (which is used in Winchester texts solely to designate the physical structure of a church), 'gesamning', '(ge)samnung' or 'halig sammung'.[51] Each time writers chose one of these words they were extending a new tradition of Christian community, a community that was founded and perpetuated in part through linguistic usage.

Alongside the Winchester vocabulary, the development of Standard Old English stands as a testament to the intellectual climate of late tenth-century England.[52] Standard Old English designates the regularized spelling used in manuscripts produced in England between the late tenth and early twelfth centuries. This *Schriftsprache*, or written standard, was based on late West Saxon but was used in manuscripts produced across England. Together, Winchester vocabulary and Standard Old English signify not only the presence of a highly organized and successful education system, but also a concern for unity and shared identity within this culture. Although initiated and implemented by a rarefied, scholarly and monastic milieu, these cultural phenomena should not be seen as divorced from the reality outside the monastic walls. Instead, they can be seen as an extension of the standardizing aims of Benedictine Reform initiated in the tenth century and implemented by, among others, Dunstan, Æthelwold and Oswald, and should be considered alongside other changes in Anglo-Saxon society that made the tenth and eleventh centuries periods of great prosperity as well as crisis, as Danish raiders mounted another series of invasions.[53]

The work of Ælfric, the monk of Eynsham who was educated at Æthelwold's New Minster at Winchester, demonstrates the rigour and vision of the intellectual training he received. George Hickes, the English churchman

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50 See Gneuss, 'Origin of Standard Old English'; Hofstetter, 'Winchester'; and Gretsch, 'Winchester Vocabulary', 'In Search of Standard Old English' and 'Key to Ælfric's Standard Old English'.

51 Hofstetter, 'Winchester', pp. 145–51.

52 See Wrenn, '"Standard" Old English'; Gneuss, 'Origin of Standard Old English'; Hofstetter, 'Winchester'; and Gretsch, 'Winchester Vocabulary'.

53 See Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations*.

and scholar who published the first Anglo-Saxon grammar in the early eighteenth century, famously described Ælfric's prose as 'purus, suavis et regularis' [clear, charming and well ordered].[54] Ælfric's clarity was a rhetorical tool, however. Obscurity did not interest him as it did not suit his instructional purpose in producing homilies, saints' Lives and a grammar. In his Old English preface to his second series of *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric noted that he strived to make the works 'læsse æðryht to gehyrenne' [less tedious to hear][55] than other religious material, but if there is pleasure to be found in his use of language, then this is because Ælfric used his language to draw his auditors closer to the lessons he sought to impart.

Ælfric's language, although artful and engaged with the literary cultures of Anglo-Saxon England, was thoroughly Christian. His commitment to the Winchester vocabulary is matched by his consistent avoidance of words associated with Germanic heroic culture and a restrained narrative style. There are clear divisions between Ælfric's work and the worlds of the Guthlac texts discussed above, for instance. And although Ælfric employed some poetic words, such as 'metod', 'heolstor' and 'brim', in his earlier homilies, he did not use them in his later *Lives of Saints*.[56] The world of Ælfric's saints is not that of the Germanic heroic world of much vernacular poetry, but instead an ahistorical otherworld of Christian heroism. It is a world created by his use of Old English. This is demonstrated well by Ælfric's Life of St Edmund. Edmund had been king of East Anglia from 855 until his death at the hands of the Danes in 870. His death was recorded in a plain entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Asser made a note of it in his *Life of King Alfred* of 893 that is evidently based on the Chronicle entry, and, in the decades immediately following Edmund's death, coins were struck in his honour naming him as St Edmund.[57] The earliest Latin Life of Edmund was written by Abbo of Fleury between 985 and 987 and Ælfric acknowledges the importance of Abbo's work in the expositionary preface that begins his English version.[58] Following the preface, Ælfric provides the briefest of descriptions of the character at the centre of the narrative:

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54 Cited by Clemoes, 'Ælfric', p. 179.
55 Ælfric, *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, p. 2, line 35. See K. Davis, 'Boredom, Brevity and Last Things'.
56 Godden, 'Experiments in Genre'. See also Godden, 'Ælfric's Changing Vocabulary', and 'Ælfric and the Vernacular Prose Tradition'. On the chronology of Ælfric's work, see J. Hill, 'Ælfric: His Life and Works'.
57 See Asser, *Alfred the Great*, ed. Keynes and Lapidge, p. 78; and Blunt, 'St Edmund Memorial Coinage'.
58 Abbo's *Life* is printed in Winterbottom (ed.), *Three Lives of English Saints*, pp. 67–87 and a translation is printed in Hervey (ed. and trans.), *Corolla sancti Eadmundi*, pp. 7–59. On the relationship between the two works, see Cavill, 'Analogy and Genre'.

> Eadmund se eadiga eastengla cyning
> wæs snotor and wurðfull and wurðode symble
> mid æþelum þeawum þone ælmihtigan god . . .

[Edmund the blessed king of the East Angles was wise and honourable and ever glorified by his excellent conduct, Almighty God . . .][59]

These lines provide a good example of the qualities Ælfric was particularly keen to promote: wisdom, honour and good conduct. They also, however, provide a good example of Ælfric's 'rhythmical prose', that is, his prose style that some have suggested to be more closely related to the traditional form of Old English verse than prose.[60] His language undercuts the formal echoes, however. Although the alliteration and wordplay may echo the Germanic poetic tradition, the language, the voice, is resolutely Christian. The description of Edmund *as* a king is brief. He is no 'dryhtnes cempa' [soldier of the lord][61] as Guthlac is, for instance. In Ælfric's work there is no talk of 'beaducræft' [battle-craft],[62] either, as there is in *Andreas*. Instead, Edmund is 'eadiga' [blessed].

The manner in which Ælfric purposefully avoided associations with Germanic heroic culture is demonstrated well in these lines from Edmund's speech:

> Næs me næfre gewunelic þæt ic worhte fleames
> ac ic wolde swiðor sweltan gif ic þorfte
> for minum agenum earde and se ælmihtiga god wat
> þæt ic nelle abugan fram his biggengum æfre
> ne fram his soþan lufe swelte ic lybbe ic.

[It was never my custom to take flight but I would rather die, if I must, for my own land, and almighty God knows that I will never turn aside from his worship nor from his true love, should I die or live.][63]

There is no talk of heroism, loyalty or kinship here. The vocabulary is cleansed of heroic connotation. Instead, to describe Edmund's loyalty to God, Ælfric employs 'biggengum', a word that is used in this sense of 'worship' exclusively in religious works, and which is derived from 'bigeng', which Ælfric uses to gloss the Latin *cultus* in his grammar.[64] 'Bigeng' also, however, carried the

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59 Ælfric, 'St Edmund', lines 13–15, in *Lives of Saints*, vol. II, pp. 314–15 (translations of 'St Edmund' are mine).
60 See Ælfric, *Homilies*, ed. Pope, pp. 105–36; Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, pp. 46–77; Bredehoft, 'Ælfric and Late Old English Verse'; and Wilcox in Ælfric, *Prefaces*, pp. 60–3.
61 *Guthlac A*, line 727, in J. Roberts (ed.), *Guthlac Poems*.
62 Used, e.g., at line 219 of *Andreas*, in Krapp (ed.), *Vercelli Book*, pp. 3–51 (p. 9).
63 Ælfric, 'St Edmund', lines 72–82, in *Lives of Saints*, vol. II, pp. 320–1.
64 Zupitza (ed.), *Ælfrics Grammatik*, p. 79, line 12.

senses of cultivation, observation and service, so it is possible to see Ælfric both describing and instructing. Ælfric's language in these works contains an inherent method of interpretation: it disciplines. It establishes and cultivates ideal behaviour in the service of a particular ideology that is, in turn, established as natural. Like his saints, Ælfric's language cultivates and worships.[65]

These aspects of Ælfric's verbal world are particularly evident in his depiction of Edmund's death:

> Hi suton þa mid gafelucum swilce him to gamenes to
> oð þæt he eall wæs besæt mid heora scotungum
> swilce igles byrsta swa swa sebastianus wæs.
> Þa geseah hingwar se arlease flot-man
> þæt se æþela cyning nolde criste wið-sacan
> ac mid anrædum geleafan hine æfre clypode
> het hine þa beheafdian and þa hæðenan swa dydon.
> Betwux þam þe he clypode to criste þagit
> þa tugon þa hæþenan þone halgan to slæge
> and mid anum swencge slogon him of þæt heafod
> and his sawl siþode gesælig to criste.

[They shot at him with arrows as if for their amusement until he was all beset with their shots, just like a porcupine's bristles as Sebastian was. When Hingwar the wicked pirate saw that the noble king would not deny Christ but with steadfast faith continued to call upon him, he then commanded men to behead him and the heathen did so. While he was still calling upon Christ, the heathen drew away the saint to kill him and with one blow struck off his head and his soul departed joyfully to Christ.][66]

What is striking about these lines is their clarity. The power of the scene is not derived from emotive language, and the measured tone is reflected in the opposing descriptions of Hingwar and Edmund, as 'arlease' [wicked] and 'æþela' [noble]. Instead, the emotional weight is provided by the reference to Sebastian that removes the incident from the social to the spiritual world and provides an interpretive frame for the scene. Paul Cavill has drawn attention to Ælfric's use of the words 'saglum' [rods] elsewhere in the Life and 'gefelucas' [arrows] in this passage. Both these words, as Cavill notes, were exclusively used in religious contexts and, as Old English had no lack of alternative terms, their use 'has the effect of locating Edmund's torment in the sphere of the biblical and Roman martyrs and distancing it from anything the

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65 See, e.g., Lees, 'In Ælfric's Words'.
66 Ælfric, 'St Edmund', lines 116–26, in *Lives of Saints*, vol. II, pp. 322–3.

Anglo-Saxons might be familiar with'.[67] Through his linguistic choices, Ælfric creates a world apparently distanced from the historical moment.[68] His sophisticated language defines the boundaries of his discourse, expressing and concealing in equal measure. What Ælfric demonstrates so clearly is that the language of a clear and charming style is ideologically shaded, too.

Language, culture, history

For Ælfric, the clarity of prose stood in contrast to the complexity of poetry. In his *Grammar*, he suggested that while prose was 'forðriht' [direct], verse was 'gelencged and gelogod' [lengthy and stylized].[69] Similarly, in his homily on Cuthbert, he noted that Bede had written two lives of the saint, 'ægðer ge æfter anfealdre gereccednysse ge æfter leodlicere gyddunge awrat' [both in the manner of a simple narrative and in the manner of poetical singing].[70] The quality of Old English verse that Ælfric called 'gelencged and gelogod' might be aligned with that which Bernard O'Donoghue has described as 'wit and verbal ingenuity'.[71] As well as the fundamental differences between the vocabularies of Old English prose and verse, the poems' use of synonyms, archaisms and compounds mean that the differences between prose and verse are not solely the result of formal divisions, but created and sustained through language.[72]

   One of the many words used often in verse and very rarely in prose is the adjective *wrætlic* [wondrous, impressive]. *Wrætlic* and words derived from it are used by the *Exodus* poet to describe the path through the Red Sea[73] and by the *Andreas* poet to describe the voice of God and later also the questions that God asks.[74] In *Beowulf*, it is used to describe, among other things, Grendel's mother's underwater home and the shield Beowulf has made to fight the dragon.[75] These uses suggest that the word denotes impressive workmanship or scale, audacious technical skill or great age but also carries overtones of wonder and mystery. *Wrætlic* speaks, therefore, of more than the objective qualities of the thing described and reveals cultural values and emotional and intellectual responses. It connotes an aesthetic experience.

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67 Cavill, 'Analogy and Genre', p. 29. See also Earl, 'Violence and Non-Violence'.
68 See Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, pp. 78–105.
69 Zupitza (ed.), *Ælfrics Grammatik*, p. 295, lines 15–16. On this phrase, see Godden, 'Literary Language'.
70 Ælfric, *Homilies: Second Series*, p. 81, lines 5–6.
71 O'Donoghue, 'Old English Poetry', p. 16.
72 Godden, 'Literary Language', p. 494. See also Dance, 'Old English Language'.
73 *Exodus*, line 298, in Krapp (ed.), *Junius Manuscript*, p. 99.
74 *Andreas*, lines 90, 628. *Wrætlic*, or words derived from it, are also used at lines 712, 740 and 1199 in the poem: Krapp (ed.), *Vercelli Book*, pp. 3–51.
75 *Beowulf*, lines 1489, 2339, in Fulk *et al.* (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, pp. 51, 80.

Only once does a word related to *wrætlic* appear in prose, when, in the *Pseudo-Matthaei Evangelium*, a visit from an angel aids Anne in her interpretation of the Psalms.[76] What is particularly striking about this usage, as Sarah Elliott Novacich has noted, is that the word is used to suggest 'that interpretation itself is a creative or artistic act'.[77] This is fitting, as the most frequent use of *wrætlic* is in the Exeter Book riddles – it is used in fifteen – and the word seems to perfectly complement their investigation of the space between description and perception. *Wrætlic* denotes a way of looking as much as it describes what is seen. It is a word that focuses attention on the processes of thought, the construction of the poetic imagination. Like Ælfric's language, *wrætlic* marks a perceptual experience that is weighted with cultural significance.

Only three poems use *wrætlic* as their first word. Two of these texts are riddles, the other is *The Ruin*, a poem that demonstrates the cultural work Old English poetics could be put to and provides a fine example of the rich complexities of traditional Old English verse. It begins with a description of what many have suggested is a ruined Roman building:

> Wrætlic is þes wealstan –   wyrde gebræcon,
> burgstede burston;   brosnað enta geweorc.

[Wondrous is this wall-stone – events broke it, battlements burst; the work of giants decays.][78]

Two things are clear in this quotation: first of all, that the destruction of the building took place in the past but is being observed in the present; and second, that this 'wealstan' is 'wrætlic', despite being broken. What the wall is as an object is unclear: these lines are an exposition of responses, not a detailed description of material facts. Throughout *The Ruin*, although description takes precedence over narration, responses are woven through descriptions. To take another example from this same quotation, 'enta geweorc' [work of giants] is a formulaic phrase also used in *Andreas*, *The Wanderer*, *Beowulf* and *Maxims II*, but never in prose.[79] Like *wrætlic* it is more emotive

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76 'Pseudo-Matthaei evangelium', in Assmann (ed.), *Angelsächsische Homilien*, pp. 117–38 (p. 127).

77 Novacich, 'Old English *Exodus*', p. 59.

78 *The Ruin*, lines 1–2, in Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*, vol. i, pp. 357–8.

79 *Andreas*, line 1495, in Krapp (ed.), *Vercelli Book*, p. 44; *The Wanderer*, line 87, in Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*, vol. i, p. 218; *Beowulf*, lines 2717 and 2774, in Fulk *et al.* (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, pp. 93, 98; *Maxims II*, line 2, in Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, p. 55. On 'enta geweorc', see Thornbury, '*Eald enta geweorc*'; Frankis, 'Thematic Significance'; Liuzza, 'Tower of Babel'; and Hunter, 'Germanic and Roman Antiquity'.

than descriptive. Aside from a possible suggestion of size, it reveals very little about the object but evokes awe, inspiration and fear. As a formula, one of the ways it generates its meanings is through intertextual association. What is signified, therefore, is a textual object and a mood of literary and historical contemplation. The materiality of the ruin remains elusive.

The ambiguity is fitting as this text is as interested in the processes of perception as the destruction wrought by time. The investigation of these two themes serves to make *The Ruin* a sophisticated and rich meditation on the relationship between the past, present and future. Throughout the poem, there is an intricate and delicate weaving of tenses as the passage of time is registered and interrogated. Following the opening half-line, once the wondrousness of the cornerstone is acknowledged, the passage of time is suggested by the introduction of *b* alliteration that begins with 'gebræcon' [1; broken] and continues through 'burgstede burston; brosnað enta geweorc' [2; battlements burst; the work of giants decays]. The poem is concerned not only with elucidating the creation of an idea of the ruins, but also with examining the history that is represented by the ruins.

This concern with the processes by which the present is produced is reflected by the extensive use of past-participle adjectives in the description of the scene:

> Hrofas sind gehrorene,   hreorge torras,
> hrungeat berofen   hrim on lime,
> scearde scurbeorge   scorene, gedrorene,
> aeldo undereotone . . .   (3–6)

[Roofs are fallen, towers wrecked, doorways destroyed, rime on the lime, roofs gaping stripped, perished, eaten away by age . . .]

The sense that the past is being brought into contact with the present is confirmed by the very sound of the words as they roll into one another. Alliteration on *hr* draws connections across lines and half-lines and the echoes and rhymes between 'gehrorene', 'hreorge', 'scorene', 'gedrorene' and 'undereotone' give the passage a sense of repetition, of circling back on itself.[80]

In contrast, in the passage which describes the life of the town, the alliteration is used to create a sense of regularity, comfort and sophistication. The unique compounds 'burgræced', 'horngestreon' and 'heresweg' indicate a heightened linguistic experience and evoke a heady scene. The moment is fleeting, however, as all that is swiftly ended with the abrupt 'oþþæt þæt onwende':

80 See Trilling, *Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, p. 52.

Beorht wæron burgræced,   burnsele monige,
heah horngestreon,   heresweg micel,
meodoheall monig   mondreama full,
oþþæt þæt onwende   wyrd seo swiþe.   (21–4)

[Bright were the buildings, with many bath houses, high arched, great martial sounds in many mead halls full of men's joys, until that was changed by mighty fate.]

Wyrd, like *wrætlic*, is a difficult word to define. Other poetic usages, such as *The Wanderer*'s 'Wyrd bið ful ared' [fate is fully fixed][81] and *The Seafarer*'s 'Wyrd biþ swiþre' [fate is greater],[82] demonstrate the significance of the concept within Anglo-Saxon literary culture and perhaps justify the fact that it has been read as an example of, in Tom Shippey's phrase, 'the Anglo-Saxon disposition to fatalism'.[83] The noun is derived, however, from the verb *weorþan* [to happen], and while some usages do match the meaning of Modern English *fate*, such as its uses in the Old English Boethius, others do not.[84] One of these usages is found in the opening line of *The Ruin*, where I have translated the plural form, 'wyrde', as 'events'.[85]

Later in the text, phonoaesthesia is again employed to evoke the passage of time, and the sense of lines 31–4 is confirmed by the laborious oral delivery of the words. These words are difficult to speak quickly. The slowness of their delivery is a significant element of the style and the technique here connects back to the introduction of the *b* sound in the opening lines. There is a unity between the imagined passage of time that created the ruins and the oral delivery of the poem. There is, however, a step change and a surge of energy from the phrase 'seah on sinc'[86] at line 35 that rises to a crescendo with the description of the riches of the town:

                              Hryre wong gecrong
gebrocen to beorgum,   þær iu beorn monig
glædmod ond goldbeorht   gleoma gefrætwed,
wlonc ond wingal   wighyrstum scan;
seah on sinc, on sylfor,   on searogimmas,
on ead, on æht,   on eorcanstan,
on þas beorhtan burg   bradan rices.   (31–7)

81 *The Wanderer*, line 5, in Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*, vol. 1, p. 218.
82 *The Seafarer*, line 115, in *ibid*., vol. 1, p. 236.
83 Shippey, 'In Alfred's Mind', p. 4.
84 The glossary to Godden and Irvine (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius*, defines *wyrd* as 'fate, destiny', p. 629. See also Timmer, '*Wyrd* in Anglo-Saxon Prose and Poetry'.
85 This translation was first suggested to me by Marijane Osborn.
86 On 'sinc', see Tyler, *Old English Poetics*, pp. 33–4.

[The place has fallen to ruin, shattered into heaps, where once many a man, glad of mind and goldbright, gleaming adorned, proud and merry with wine shone in war-gear, gazed on treasure, on silver, on curious gems, on wealth, on property, on the precious stone, on this bright city, this glorious place.]

In these lines, the poem builds the city from the description of the wealth held by its occupants. Those *beornas* enjoying their wealth and wine dominate the scene. The treasure is not significant in and of itself; instead it is the enjoyment of the treasure by the *beornas* that defines the meaning of the scene.[87] Importantly, the noun *beorn* [man] carries overt military overtones and conveys a very particular sense of masculinity. It is used by the *Dream of the Rood* poet to refer to the warrior-like Christ,[88] and *beorn* or words derived from it are used fifteen times in *The Battle of Maldon*.[89] In the poem commonly known as *The Gifts of Men* it is written that 'sum bið wiges heard / beadocræftig beorn, þær bord stunað' [one is resolute in warfare, a man skilled in fighting, when shields resound'].[90] It is a word Ælfric never used.

These idealized Anglo-Saxon warriors stand in contrast to the people responsible for constructing the buildings the poem celebrates, who are briefly noted earlier in the poem:

> Eorðgrap hafað
> Waldendwyrhtan   forweorone, geleorene,
> heardgripe hrusan . . .   (6–8)

[The earth's grasp holds the ruling builders, perished, passed away, grip of the ground . . .]

The term used to denote those who raised the buildings, 'waldendwyrhtan', is formed by compounding *wealdend* [ruler], the root of which, *weald*, is related to the Modern English *wield*, and *wyrhta* [maker(s)]. The sense of this compound is not celebratory, however. There is a subtle bathos to it and it creates another image of the inevitably transitory nature of power. The grandeur of their architecture remains, but it is these people who are held in an 'eorðgrap' [earthgrip] and it is their passing that allowed the *beornas* to occupy the town.

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87 On treasure and Old English verse, see *ibid*., pp. 9–101.
88 *The Dream of the Rood*, line 42, in Krapp (ed.), *Vercelli Book*, p. 62.
89 At lines 17, 62, 92, 101, 111, 131, 154, 160, 182, 245, 257, 270, 277, 305, 311, in Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, pp. 7–16.
90 *The Gifts of Men*, lines 39–40, in Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*, vol. I, p. 221, in which it is titled 'God's Gifts to Humankind'.

Considered in these terms, *The Ruin* commits an act of appropriation: it claims the Roman ruins for the Anglo-Saxons. The poem writes the Anglo-Saxons into place. This place is found through the contemplation of the material remains of a distant historical culture expressed in a language that is similarly archaic and culturally loaded. A scene is created in which the Anglo-Saxons are able to dwell, a scene that seems to naturalize the processes of history. As James Doubleday has suggested, 'implicit in *The Ruin* is a philosophy of history, a way of looking at historical events'.[91] This philosophy is both a product of the historical circumstances of the Anglo-Saxons and a cultivated cultural phenomenon. In *The Ruin* the presence of the past is marked not just by the ruined Roman buildings, but by the manner in which the contemplation of those buildings is expressed and interrogated.

The Ruin's philosophy of history is constructed by its language and in its deployment of what Elizabeth Tyler has termed the 'aesthetics of the familiar'.[92] *The Ruin* is deeply engaged with the traditions of Old English poetic expression. The compounds – such as 'waldendwyrhtan' [7; ruling builders], 'horngestreon' [22; horn-treasure] and 'teaforgeapa' (30; formed from *teafor* [red] and *geap* [lofty, steep]), which are all unique; 'searogimmas' [35; curious gems], which is shared only with *Beowulf* (at 2749);[93] and the formulaic phrase 'wlonc ond wingal' [34; proud and merry with wine],[94] which is used ruefully in *The Seafarer* to describe thanes unaware of a world without the security and comfort provided by their lord – all serve to situate the poem within the Germanic poetic tradition. *The Ruin* also demonstrates another striking difference between prose and verse – the omission of the demonstrative 'the', which is perhaps a result of the metrical structure requiring as few unstressed syllables as possible.[95] The language of this text is determined by both formal requirements and cultural perceptions of correct expression. Implicit within this aesthetic scheme, in a similar manner to Ælfrician prose, is a system of interpretation. The style of traditional Old English poetic language invites a certain reading, a reading that emphasizes the long traditions of Anglo-Saxon culture, the centrality of the warrior ethos to that culture, and the sophistication of the vernacular literary tradition.

91 Doubleday, 'The Ruin', p. 370.
92 Tyler, *Old English Poetics*.
93 On compounding, see Orchard, 'Reconstructing *The Ruin*', p. 53.
94 *The Seafarer*, line 29, in Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*, vol. I, p. 233.
95 See Godden, 'Literary Language', p. 505.

Old English poetic form: genre, style, prosody

HARUKO MOMMA

This chapter considers the genre, style and prosody of Old English poetry, often in association with cultural history. In our willingness to examine formal features of Anglo-Saxon verse compositions in their contexts, we may bear in mind that we have access to only a fraction of this poetic tradition, and that many of the practices of vernacular poetry in early medieval England have been lost irretrievably. Gone is the feast, for example, attended by Cædmon and his secular fellows in the late seventh century. And so are songs of Ingeld and other such heroes heard at the dinner table of a certain bishop in the late eighth century, poems heard by Alfred in his youth at the royal court of Wessex and, were we to trust the ingenious William of Malmesbury, the songs sung by Harold's men the night before the Battle of Hastings.[1]

The only way for us to approach the culture of Anglo-Saxon verse is through the manuscripts, and the greater part of the extant poetic corpus is recorded in four codices produced in the second half of the tenth century and the early eleventh: the Junius Manuscript or Junius 11 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11, s. x/xi, xi[1]), the Vercelli Book (Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare CXVII, s. x[2]), the Exeter Book (Exeter Cathedral, MS 3501, s. x[2]) and the Beowulf Manuscript (London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A. xv, s. x/xi).[2] While various attempts have been made to narrow down the dates of production for these four manuscripts, they still fall in the period of the monastic reform and the golden age of vernacular literature in late Anglo-Saxon England.[3] The places of production for the four poetic codices cannot be

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1 *HE*, IV.24; Bullough, 'What has Ingeld to do with Lindisfarne?', p. 124; Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ed. Stevenson, chap. 22; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, vol. I, pp. 452–5 (III.241–2).

2 See further Ker, *Catalogue*, nos. 116, 216, 334, 394.

3 See, e.g., Lockett, 'Integrated Re-examination'.

determined with certainty, but they are generally associated with southern parts of England. The dialectal form of the poems recorded in these manuscripts is predominantly late West Saxon, although they tend to have a greater proportion of non-West Saxon spellings (usually labelled as Anglian or Kentish) than do prose texts produced in comparable settings. The dialectal indeterminacy of poems recorded in the major poetic codices has been interpreted as evidence for either their northern origins or the existence of a general poetic dialect – archaic and artificial – cultivated by and for the Anglo-Saxon poets.[4] In short, our understanding of Anglo-Saxon vernacular poetry relies heavily on data preserved in artefacts that are by nature late, textual and clerical as opposed to early, oral and courtly or common. The poems found in the four major manuscripts are formally similar to one another to a large degree and have therefore been labelled, though not without problems, as 'classical' Old English verse. We are nonetheless fortunate enough to have verse compositions in a good number of other manuscripts, both early and late, so that we may place the contents of the four poetic codices in a broader perspective.

It is more difficult to answer the question as to when individual Old English poems were composed. Except for a few pieces whose *termini a quo* can be determined by external evidence, such as *The Battle of Maldon* (after 991) and *The Death of Edward* (after 1065), the dating of Old English poems still remains open to debate. There has been much discussion on the subject generally, and the dating of *Beowulf* in particular has attracted a wide range of hypotheses on both linguistic and non-linguistic grounds.[5] Michael Lapidge, for instance, has used the pattern of errors committed by the scribes to postulate that '*Beowulf* existed in written form in the first half of the eighth century'. And yet, this theory points towards a literary archetype and may not necessarily preclude the possibility that some parts of the poem already existed in, say, 700, or that other parts, such as homiletic phrases in Hrothgar's 'sermon', were added by later scribes.[6] We could perhaps compare an Old English poem to medieval architecture whose material was taken from diverse locations in place and time, and whose construct has been repeatedly altered by renovations, additions and demolitions. Hence we may, with Roy Liuzza, regard 'the text of any Old English poem, most often

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4 See, e.g., Fulk *et al.* (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, pp. clvii–clviii; and Sisam, 'Dialect Origins' in his *Studies*, esp. p. 138.
5 See, e.g., Chase (ed.), *Dating of Beowulf*; and Fulk, *History of Old English Meter*.
6 Lapidge, 'Archetype of *Beowulf*'.

a unique manuscript', as 'an aggregate rather than an authority' and further consider the extant Anglo-Saxon manuscripts to be 'essentially medieval editions, reflecting the poetic understanding – or sometimes lack of understanding – of the scribe, not necessarily the author'.[7]

Old English poetic genres

Varieties of religious poetry

The Anglo-Saxons have left very little evidence for how they differentiated types of poems composed in their mother tongue. Arguably the closest thing to such a reference – and also the longest – is found in the fourth book of the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, where Bede describes the kinds of poem made by Cædmon after he took monastic vows:

> Canebat autem de creatione mundi et origine humani generis et tota Genesis historia, de egressu Israel ex Aegypto et ingressu in terram repromissionis, de aliis plurimis sacrae scripturae historiis, de incarnatione dominica, passione, resurrectione et ascensione in caelum, de Spiritus Sancti aduentu et apostolorum doctrina; item de terrore futuri iudicii et horrore poenae gehennalis ac dulcedine regni caelestis multa carmina faciebat. Sed et alia perplura de beneficiis et iudiciis diuinis, in quibus cunctis homines ab amore scelerum abstrahere, ad dilectionem uero et sollertiam bonae, actionis excitare curabat.   (*HE*, IV.24)

> [He sang about the creation of the world, the origin of the human race, and the whole history of Genesis, of the departure of Israel from Egypt and the entry into the promised land and of many other of the stories taken from the sacred Scriptures: of the incarnation, passion and resurrection of the Lord, of His ascension into heaven, of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the teaching of the apostles. He also made songs about the terrors of future judgement, the horrors of the pains of hell and the joys of the heavenly kingdom. In addition he composed many other songs about the divine mercies and judgements, in all of which he sought to turn his hearers away from delight in sin and arouse in them the love and practice of good works.]

Bede here lists Cædmon's work by its contents and explains the purpose of his endeavour as exhortation. From a historicist perspective, this list informs us that only a few decades after Cædmon gave up his secular habit, the notion of composing vernacular poems mainly on biblical material for the promotion of piety had become common in monastic communities of

7 Liuzza, 'Old English *Riddle 30*', pp. 13–14.

Northumbria. Given the popularity of Bede's *History*, the idea may well have spread, in subsequent centuries, to other kingdoms in England and some parts of the continent.[8]

Almost all types of religious poetry mentioned by Bede are attested in the extant Old English corpus. *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Daniel* comprise the first three texts of Junius 11, a manuscript ascribed to Cædmon by its first modern editor Franciscus Junius in 1655. His conjecture about the origin of the manuscript is no longer supported today, not only because Cædmon's authorship is recognized only for a short hymn attested elsewhere, but also because no two pieces in the manuscript are believed to have been composed by the same poet. In fact, *Genesis* in itself is a composite piece, since the poem contains an interpolation known as *Genesis B* (lines 235–851), which has been translated from a ninth-century Old Saxon poem.[9] According to Barbara Raw, the 'original plan' for Junius 11 concerned only the three Old Testament narratives, whereas the fourth and last piece, *Christ and Satan*, was added as an 'afterthought'.[10] At first sight Junius 11 seems to present a paradox: on the one hand, linguistic and palaeographical evidence suggests that this manuscript was 'produced less by design than by accretion'; on the other, modern readers of the Junius poems have sensed that the codex was 'brought together purposefully'.[11] How are we to reconcile these two observations, which seem equally valid and yet mutually exclusive?

The manuscript known as Junius 11 embodies two separate plans, each showing a distinct anthological design. According to the 'original plan', the manuscript was to provide a sequence of Old Testament narratives arranged in chronological order. When *Christ and Satan* was added as a second book (Liber II), the original portion would by implication have been reconceived as Liber I of the now augmented anthology. As J. R. Hall has pointed out, Junius 11 as we now have it seems to foreground the theme of redemption. While the original portion of the manuscript offers narratives about the fall of angels and the fall of man, Liber II refers to the redemption of Adam and Eve through Christ's triumph over Satan.[12] Furthermore, Liber II describes the pains of hell and the joys of the heavenly kingdom through the mouth of Satan and anticipates the terror of the future Judgement. With the addition of *Christ*

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8 For the dissemination of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, see R. H. C. Davis, 'Bede after Bede'.

9 For *Genesis B* and the Old Saxon *Genesis*, see Doane (ed.), *Saxon Genesis*.

10 Raw, 'Construction of Junius 11', pp. 203, 205.

11 O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*, p. 180; Liuzza, 'Introduction' to *Poems of MS Junius 11*, p. xi.

12 J. R. Hall, 'Old English Epic of Redemption'.

and Satan, the manuscript seems to have become even more 'Cædmonian' – or, rather, even more 'Bedan' – in that the codex now covers the whole of sacred history.

With the exception of *Christ and Satan*, much of the New Testament material in Old English poetry occurs in the Exeter Book and the Vercelli Book. The Exeter Book begins with a poem known as *Christ*, which in fact is an anthology consisting of three separate pieces dealing with the Advent, the Ascension and the Judgement, respectively.[13] *The Descent into Hell*, which occurs in a later portion of the manuscript, begins with a scene from the Gospel. The Vercelli Book includes *The Dream of the Rood*, in which Christ's Passion is narrated from the perspective of the cross. In addition to its close association with the Paschal Triduum, the poem also seems to point towards the liturgical time falling between Easter and Ascension Day, because it occurs immediately before prose Rogation homilies in the manuscript.[14] Another Vercelli poem, *Andreas*, also touches on material from the New Testament in the dialogue between St Andrew and Christ disguised as a helmsman, while the narrative framework of the poem itself is the Apostle's (apocryphal) mission to the land of the cannibalistic Mermedonians. In its manuscript context, *Andreas* is immediately followed by *The Fates of the Apostles*, a short poem that catalogues the deeds of the Apostles and the manners of their deaths.

These and several other references to the Gospel aside, however, Old English poetry seems to place less emphasis on Christ's time on earth than on his divinity manifested in such actions as the Harrowing of Hell and the Judgement. In the history of English verse, attempts to narrate the life of Jesus through the principle of Gospel harmony do not seem to have been made before the *Orrmulum*, a twelfth-century homiletic poem composed in non-alliterative syllabic metre. This lacuna seems rather curious, not only because the subject becomes a staple in later medieval English literature, but also because one of the extant manuscripts of the *Heliand*, an anonymous ninth-century Old Saxon poem on the life of the Saviour, was most likely produced in England in the second half of the tenth century. Since this version of the *Heliand* is almost six thousand lines long even with its defective ending, the text is the longest alliterative poem known to have been produced in Anglo-Saxon England.[15]

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13 Muir's edition of the Exeter Book treats *Christ* as three independent poems: *The Advent Lyrics*, *The Ascension* and *Christ in Judgement* (see *Exeter Anthology*, vol. 1).
14 See Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*; and Scragg (ed.), *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 310.
15 See Sievers (ed.), *Heliand*; and Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 137.

Probably the most noticeable absence from Bede's list is hagiography, a genre of religious literature attested in both the Vercelli Book (*Andreas*, *Elene*) and the Exeter Book (*Guthlac*, *Juliana*). Less visible perhaps, and yet equally significant, is the lack of any explicit reference to poems of homiletic or liturgical nature. While the four poetic manuscripts contain few independent homiletic pieces (e.g., *Alms-Giving*, *Homiletic Fragment I* and *II*), homiletic passages abound in longer poems. Furthermore, the eleventh-century manuscript Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 201 (CCCC 201) offers several homiletic and liturgical compositions, which as a whole seem to comprise a 'unified devotional exercise connected with the sacrament of penance'.[16] The first piece to appear in this penitential suite is *The Judgement Day II*, a 'rather close translation' of Bede's Latin poem *De die iudicii*.[17] This medium-sized poem is followed by a homiletic composition known as *The Rewards of Piety*, a title first suggested by Fred C. Robinson to combine the two separate pieces edited in ASPR as *An Exhortation to Christian Living* and *A Summons to Prayer*. Robinson believes that the latter text, an English-Latin macaronic composition, is a concluding section of the homiletic discourse developed in the former.[18] These homiletic texts are followed by *The Lord's Prayer II* and *The Gloria I*. Though based on a liturgical text, each of these two poems has augmented the Latin original so greatly that it virtually 'transcends the limits of a verse paraphrase'.[19]

Another version of *The Gloria I* is found in the so-called Benedictine Office of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 121, an eleventh-century manuscript from Worcester. Though based on the services developed for monastic communities, the Benedictine Office deals mostly with the prime and uses a number of Old English poetic compositions including *The Lord's Prayer III*, *The Creed* and passages from the Psalms. Because of its selective nature and its use of the vernacular, the Benedictine Office has often been seen as a compilation intended for a non-monastic audience.[20]

In addition to the short passages cited in the Benedictine Office, verse renditions of psalms are attested in two other places in the Old English corpus: a brief excerpt added to the Eadwine Psalter (90.16.1–95.2.1) and a large portion

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16 Caie, 'Text and Context', p. 162.
17 Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, p. lxxi.
18 See further Robinson, 'Rewards of Piety'.
19 Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, p. lxxiv. Both of these 'liturgical' pieces belong to the later portion of the manuscript. For CCCC 201, see Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 49 (s. xi[in. & med.]).
20 See Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, pp. lxxiv–lxxviii; and Griffiths (ed. and trans.), *Service of Prime*. For Junius 121, see Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 338 (s. xi [3rd quarter]).

of the famous Paris Psalter (51.6–150.3).[21] Because of their close proximity to one another, these three attestations of metrical psalms are considered to have derived from a common source.[22] This matrix of poetic psalms itself seems to have been built on 'the rich tradition already available of vernacular renditions of the Bible, and particularly of psalter'.[23] Given the existence of multiple versions of Old English verses in manuscripts produced in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, religious houses during this period seem to have not only sanctioned the use of the vernacular but also circulated certain poetic texts, thus enhancing what might be called a textual community of English poetry.

Varieties of non-religious poetry

A good part of our understanding of non-religious Old English poetry derives from the Exeter Book. This manuscript is most likely to have been bequeathed by Leofric to Exeter Cathedral, since the bishop's donation list, drawn up sometime between 1069 and 1072, includes an item that reads 'i mycel englisc boc be gehwilcum þingum on leoðwisan geworht' [one large English book on many subjects composed in verse].[24] Even allowing for the fact that this brief description is an entry for a catalogue, we may still wonder about the meagre attention paid to the contents of this large vernacular manuscript: the wealth of subjects treated therein, both religious and secular, is summarized as a medley of miscellaneous 'things'.

Such a treatment may, however, be warranted by the organization of the *boc* itself. While the Exeter Book opens with a series of longer religious poems, the rest of the manuscript is a collection of shorter pieces that have been assigned to various genres by modern scholars.[25] The first shorter poem to appear in the manuscript is *The Wanderer*, a 115-line piece generally considered to be one of the representative specimens of elegy. Though originally used for classical poems composed of elegiac distichs, the term 'elegy' has customarily been applied to a group of affective lyrics of nostalgic nature in the Exeter Book. Probably the best-known definition of the Old English elegy is the one suggested by Stanley B. Greenfield in 1966: 'a relatively short reflective or dramatic poem embodying a contrasting pattern of loss and consolation, ostensibly based upon a specific personal experience

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21 For the Eadwine Psalter and the Paris Psalter, see Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 91 (s. xii[med.]) and no. 367 (s. xi[med.]), respectively.
22 See Baker, 'Little-Known Variant Text'; and Krapp (ed.), *Paris Psalter*, p. xx.
23 Toswell, 'Relationship of the Metrical Psalter', p. 299.
24 Gameson, 'Origin of the Exeter Book', pp. 136, 141. All translations from Old English are my own.
25 For the compilation of the Exeter Book, see, e.g., Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter*, pp. 148–64.

or observation, and expressing an attitude towards that experience'.[26] Various attempts have been made to categorize this genre, and in the process different Exeter poems have been identified as elegies (as discussed further in Chapter 13 below).[27]

The Wanderer and The Seafarer are the first two elegies to appear in the manuscript, but they are separated by The Gifts of Men and Precepts, two poems that are both classified as wisdom poetry. According to the definition offered by T. A. Shippey, poems of wisdom and learning 'aim primarily neither at narrative nor at self-expression, but deal instead with the central concerns of human life – what it is; how it varies; how a man may hope to succeed in it, and after it'. This genre consists of 'a group of some fifteen to twenty poems dispersed through several of the surviving manuscripts' including the Exeter Book (e.g., Vainglory, The Order of the World), the Vercelli Book (e.g., Soul and Body I) and others (e.g., Maxims II, The Rune Poem).[28] Many of the Old English wisdom poems are gnomic in nature, as they judiciously impart knowledge that is simultaneously practical and universal. Such nuggets of wisdom customarily take the form of propositions constructed around the verb beon [to be] or sculan [shall] in the present indicative, for example:

> is **byþ** oferceald [ice **is** exceedingly cold]
>
> (The Rune Poem, 29a)

> sum **sceal** wildne fugel   wloncne atemian,
> heafoc on handa   (The Fortunes of Men, 85–6a)

> [some man **shall** tame a wild bird, a proud
> hawk, on his hand]

Catenulate verse is a genre that has a significant overlap with wisdom poetry, but which seems to have its own raison d'être. In his Old English Catalogue Poems, Nicholas Howe discusses both gnomic compositions, such as The Gifts of Men and Maxims I, and non-wisdom poems including Widsith, The Fates of the Apostles and The Menologium. The last piece, for instance, is a mnemonic recitation of feast days structured around the liturgical calendar. In the manuscript, this poem is placed side by side with Maxims II to form 'preliminary

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26 Greenfield, 'Old English Elegies', p. 143.
27 See, for example, Klinck (ed.), Old English Elegies.
28 Shippey (ed. and trans.), Poems of Wisdom and Learning, p. 1 and note. See further N. Howe, Old English Catalogue Poems, pp. 133–65. All citations of Old English poems are from ASPR.

matter' to the C-text of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.[29] Being a purely formal category, catenulate structure is by no means limited to poetry. As Fred C. Robinson points out, several other versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle – which by itself may be considered a list of historical events – occur in their manuscript contexts with miscellaneous lists, including genealogies and laws. Such practice, common among scribes and compilers of Old English texts, seems to point towards 'a strong tendency to anthologize lists, and this suggests in turn that the Anglo-Saxons acknowledged and accepted the list as a structural principle'.[30]

Given the diversity of the shorter Exeter poems, the assessment of the manuscript made by the contemporary cataloguer may seem justifiable. And yet the heterogeneity of the codex manifests itself not so much *among* the individual poems as *within* them, in that many of these poems exhibit characteristics of two or more genres. The best-known examples of such generic *Mischung* are probably *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, each of which begins in an elegiac mode and switches to a homiletic mode in the middle.[31] Both these elegies close with gnomic expressions reminiscent of the Beatitudes, e.g., 'til biþ se þe his treowe gehealdeþ' [*The Wanderer*, 112a; happy is he who maintains his faith]; 'eadig bið se þe eaþmod leofaþ [*The Seafarer*, 107a; blessed is he who lives humbly].[32] The generic heterogeneity of the shorter Exeter poems is perhaps best represented by the Riddles. Of the ninety-five extant specimens found in the manuscript, some are translations from Latin *enigmata*, and others are original compositions with what might be called a 'native feel'. Some offer profound meditation on the marvel of creation, while others evoke pathos by making animals and inanimate objects speak of their hard 'lives'. Some are homiletic or didactic in tone, others heroic or elegiac, and yet others common or almost bawdy with their double entendres.[33] The Exeter Riddles challenge modern readers to identify not only their intended semantic referents but also their generic identities. In the manuscript, a number of riddles may be read as elegies (e.g., Riddle 60), whereas some elegies may warrant 'solutions' to their enigmatic allusions (e.g., *Wulf and Eadwacer*). As such, enigma may be seen as a mode of expression used widely in Old English poetry (see further

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29 Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, p. lx. For the manuscript, see Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 191 (s. xi¹–xi²).
30 Robinson, 'Immediate Context', p. 27.
31 See further Shippey, '*The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* as Wisdom Poetry'.
32 'Gnomic formulas' are found throughout the Old English poetic corpus: see Momma, 'Gnomic Formula'.
33 See, for example, P. J. Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles*.

Chapter 18 below).[34] As diverse as they are, the shorter poems in the Exeter Book seem to be loosely connected by shared generic traits and exhibit a set of family resemblances, which as a whole may reflect the taste of the compiler.

Heroic poetry may well have been an integral part of the oral tradition of the Old English verbal arts through which myths and legends of the heroic age had been kept alive for generations. But the body of such poetry, even if it existed in the cultural memory of the Anglo-Saxons, seems to have seldom made its way onto parchment. The extant Old English poetic corpus includes relatively few heroic poems, and three of them – *The Battle of Finnsburh*, *Waldere* and *The Battle of Maldon* – are individual fragments so that we may not place them in the contexts of their original manuscripts. *Widsith* and *Deor* refer to heroic figures such as Hrothgar, Ingeld, Weland and the Geats, but these short Exeter poems have recast such pre-Christian material into catenulate and elegiac format, respectively. The culture of literacy apparently did not create a friendly environment for the preservation of Old English heroic poetry.

The sole exception – and a remarkable one at that – is, of course, *Beowulf*. While the protagonist of this single longest extant Old English poem is unknown elsewhere, the text alludes to numerous legendary and semi-historical figures from the heroic age. In its manuscript context, however, *Beowulf* is the only text of this kind, whereas other pieces assembled there represent different genres: prose hagiography (*The Passion of St Christopher*), biblical narrative in verse (*Judith*) and catenulate prose (*The Wonders of the East* and *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*). These generically diverse texts nonetheless all refer, in one way or another, to prodigious creatures of mostly Eastern origin, and as such the Beowulf Manuscript may be seen as 'Liber de diversis monstris, anglice' – a book of various monsters, in English.[35] The codex certainly offers an ideal abode for exotic animals, men having the heads of dogs, weapon-wielding women, a mountain of dragons and more than one set of cannibals.

Poetic compositions are found in a variety of non-religious prose texts as well. Beginning with the entry for 937 (known independently as *The Battle of Brunanburh*), the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle occasionally turns to verses – some more 'classical' than others – to commemorate events such as battles and the

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34 See Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*.
35 Sisam, 'Compilation of the Beowulf Manuscript' in his *Studies*, p. 96. See further Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*.

passing of luminary figures (explored in Chapter 9 above). Metrical charms are found in a number of manuscripts, including the medical texts known as *Lacununga* and Bald's *Leechbook* (discussed in Chapter 19 below).[36]

Orality and authorship

As we have observed, almost all of the generic terms, including the ones for secular poems, are loanwords (e.g., elegiac, heroic, gnomic). The absence of native terms in this semantic field is neither a coincidence nor a matter of taste on our part. Even when we search through the Old English lexicon for words referring to specific types of poem, we find but a handful of common words. Our impression is corroborated by the *Thesaurus of Old English*, for this comprehensive onomasiological lexicon lists no more than six simplexes under the category of 'poetry': *giedd*, *galdor*, *gieddung*, *sang*, *leoþ* and *fitt*. Of these, *giedd*, *galdor*, *sang* and *leoþ* also appear under the category 'a song, a poem to be sung or recited'.[37] The significant overlap between the two semantic fields should not surprise us, because the poetic practice of the Anglo-Saxons antedated their conversion to Christianity and, by implication, their introduction to the culture of literacy. This historicist inference seems to comport well with lexical evidence, since verbs that commonly denote 'to compose in verse, versify' are *singan* and *asingan*, both strong verbs and therefore of early Germanic origin.[38] Lexically speaking, therefore, the Anglo-Saxons do not seem to have differentiated composition of poems, singing of songs and, even, utterances of formal speech. A case in point is the word *giedd*. The *Dictionary of Old English* provides this noun with such diverse definitions as 'poem, song', 'report, tale, story', 'eloquent speech', 'saying, proverb', 'divination', 'insult', 'figurative speech, metaphor', 'reckoning, reason', 'riddle in verse' (*s.v. gydd*). No single word in present-day English seems to cover as many semantic fields as this.

The oral origin of Anglo-Saxon poetry may well explain why the majority of the extant Old English poems are anonymous. Of the poetic compositions that have come down to us, no more than eight may be associated with specific names, and of these names – four at most – virtually none seems to stand the test of authorship, at least according to the modern sense of the word. Despite being the first named English-language poet, Cædmon is

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36 See Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, pp. xxxii–xliii, cxxx–cxxxviii.
37 See Roberts *et al.*, *Thesaurus of Old English*, 09.03.05.01.01 and 18.02.07.01.01, respectively.
38 *Ibid.*, 09.03.05.01.02.

known to us only through Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. Even his *Hymn* does not come directly from the *History* but indirectly either through glosses appended to Bede's Latin paraphrase of the poem or from the main texts of the anonymous translation of the *History* (i.e., the Old English Bede).

Bede is the traditional author of the five-line Old English *Death Song* quoted in a Latin letter written by his disciple Cuthbert. Despite the wide dissemination of this short vernacular poem (extant in thirty-five manuscripts), its authorship may not be established with certainty, not only because of the debatable authenticity of the relevant portion of the letter but also because of the possibility that this short gnomic verse was a proverb quoted by Bede for the occasion. As such, *Bede's Death Song* may be compared to *A Proverb from Winfrid's Time*, a two-line vernacular poem quoted in an anonymous Latin letter from a later part of the eighth century.[39]

Cynewulf is the name associated with two texts in the Vercelli Book (*The Fates of the Apostles*, *Elene*) and two more in the Exeter Book ('The Ascension' or *Christ II*, *Juliana*). We are able to associate these four compositions with one poet because of the signature produced in runic letters towards the end of each. Cynewulf's signatures are a type of cipher. In *The Fates of the Apostles*, for instance, the runes are scattered over seven lines (98–104) in the order F-W-U-L-C-Y-N.[40] Cynewulf also offers biographical information, but this amounts to no more than a conventional portrait of an old sinner in need of prayer from the reader (e.g., *Elene*, 1236–56a). While scholars are generally in agreement on the authenticity of Cynewulf's signatures, the Anglo-Saxon scribes or compilers seem to have treated his signed poems just like any other text. In the Exeter Book, the 'Ascension' comes in the middle of the anthology sequence dealing with acts of Christ. In the Vercelli Book, *The Fates of the Apostles* is placed immediately after *Andreas* and as such seems to function as an epilogue to this apostolic *vita*.

A metrical preface and a metrical epilogue are appended to the *Pastoral Care*, an Old English prose text dated to the late ninth century and attributed to Alfred. If Alfred were indeed responsible for the composition of these two pieces, he would function as a perfect author-poet, because we know his approximate dates (849–99), the place of his origin (Wessex), his title (king), his genealogical and biographical information (through Asser's *Vita* and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, among other sources) and his place in literary history

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39 See Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, pp. lxvii–lxix, xciv–cvii; *HE*, pp. 579–87; and Bredehoft, *Authors, Audiences and Old English Verse*, pp. 20–6, 43.

40 See further Frese, 'Cynewulf's Runic Signatures'.

(a prose translator and a promoter of vernacular literacy). And yet Alfred's authorship may not be securely established for these poems, partly because the metrical epilogue appears in only two extant manuscripts of the *Pastoral Care*, and partly because even the metrical preface, which has been attested in two other manuscripts, refers to King Alfred solely in the third person.[41] Furthermore, we seem to have enough evidence to conclude that prefaces and epilogues were recognized in the learned community as a distinct, if somewhat minor, genre of vernacular poetry whose function it was to accompany the works of Latin authors. A case in point is a prayer added probably by a scribe in one of the manuscripts of the Old English Bede. This prayer employs the voice of Bede in the first person – 'bidde ic' [1a; I pray] – to ask readers to pray for the scribe 'þe ðas boc awrat bam handum twam' [5; who wrote this book with his two hands]. In the case of the metrical preface to the *Pastoral Care*, moreover, the first-person voice does not even represent Gregory, the original author of the text, but instead the textual body of his work:

> Siðða min on englisc   Ælfred kyning
> awende worda gehwelc,   and me his writerum
> sende suð and norð . . .   (11–13a)

> [Afterwards King Alfred translated into English
> my every word and sent me to his scribes
> south and north . . .]

Such discursive ventriloquism is attested elsewhere in the Old English poetic corpus. For example, a brief and incomplete macaronic poem known as *Aldhelm*, which occurs in a tenth-century copy of *De uirginitate*, has a first-person narrative voice that tells the reader how Aldhelm, 'bonus auctor' [2b; good author]' and 'æþele sceop' [3a; noble scop], 'me gesette' [1a; set me down].[42] While we know of only a small number of vernacular poems speaking of the work of Latin authors in a first-person narrative voice, we are very much familiar with the idea of inanimate objects acting as *reordberend* [speech bearers] through such poems as *The Husband's Message*, *The Dream of the Rood*, riddles and the runic inscriptions on the Ruthwell Cross and the Brussels Cross.[43]

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41 See Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, pp. cxii–cxvii. For the authorship and date of the *Meters of Boethius*, see Godden and Irvine (eds.), *Old English Boethius*, vol. 1, pp. 146–51.

42 See further Robinson, 'Immediate Context', pp. 11–25, and Godden, 'Prologues and Epilogues'.

43 See, e.g., Earl, 'King Alfred's Talking Poems'.

Old English poetic style

The style of Old English poetry is complex and yet flexible, intricate and yet almost infinitely adaptable. In this section I will consider the construct of such a poetic style by examining vocabulary (e.g., poetic diction), arrangement of material (e.g., variation) and use of set expressions (e.g., formulas).

Poetic lexis

Modern readers of Old English poems note, almost before anything else, the rich vocabulary for such subject matter as warriors, navigation and weapons. To take 'sword' for an example, the *Thesaurus of Old English* has a sizeable section for this particular semantic field.[44] Of the simplexes listed there, some occur throughout the corpus (e.g., *sweord*, *brand*), others exclusively or almost exclusively in poetry (e.g., *heoru*), and yet others exclusively in poetry only when used in this sense (e.g., *iren*, lit. 'iron').[45] Some of these simplexes are synecdochal, as they derive the meaning 'sword' from general categories (e.g., *wæpen*, lit. 'weapon') or from smaller parts (e.g., *ecg*, lit. 'edge'). Many of the 'sword' words in Old English poetry are compounds formed by using 'sword' simplexes as base words and adding metonymic or synecdochal terms such as battle (*beadu-*, *guþ-*, *hilde-*), victory (*sige-*), costliness (*maþþum-*) and ornamentation (*wæg-*, lit. 'wave'), e.g., *beadumece*, *guþswerod*, *hildebil*, *sigemece*, *maþþumsweord*, *wægsweord*. Several other 'sword' compounds end with *-mæl* ('ornament') to underline the decorative nature of their referents, e.g., *brogdenmæl* [damascened sword], *hringmæl* [sword with ring-like patterns]. Attributes of swords, such as 'hard' and 'adorned', may be used as base words to form adjectival compounds: e.g. *fyrheard* [fire-hardened], *grægmæl* [grey-coloured], *scirmæled* [brightly adorned], *wyrmfah* [adorned with figures of snakes]. Since adjectives often assume nominal function in poetry, these and other adjectival compounds add metonymic layers to the semantic field of 'sword'.

A small number of compounds and phrases that signify 'sword' derive this meaning through metaphorical transference of their base words, which denote 'friend', 'light', 'what is left' and the like: e.g. *guþwine* [lit. battle-friend], *hildeleoma* [lit. battle-light], *fela laf* [lit. remnant of files], *hamela laf* [lit. remnant of hammers]. We customarily use the term 'kenning', a loan-word from Old Icelandic, to describe such Old English compounds and

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44 See Roberts *et al.*, *Thesaurus of Old English*, 13.02.08.04.03.
45 For the last category, see Cronan, 'Poetic Meanings'.

phrases. Compared to kennings in skaldic poetry, however, metaphorical expressions found in Old English poetry are less complex and smaller in number. According to one count, kennings comprise no more than 2 per cent of the compounds in *Beowulf*.[46]

Old English poetry abounds in synonyms, antonyms, litotes, synecdoches, metonyms and other figurative expressions to enhance the use of words and phrases, especially of nominal function. To this list may be added paronomasia, a trope that connects diverse words through phonological association.[47] In the opening passage of *Genesis A*, for instance, the poet seems to play a threefold pun on God's Word and enhance its effects through alliteration:

> Us is riht micel   ðæt we rodera **weard**,
> **wereda** wuldorcining,   **wordum** herigen . . .   (*Genesis A*, 1–2)

> [It is our great duty to praise with **words**
> the **guardian** of heaven, the glorious king of **hosts** . . .]

Variation

In one of the most memorable beheading scenes in English-language literature, the poet of *Judith* begins with the following statement before describing how the heroine drew a sword from its sheath with her right hand, while the inebriated Holofernes lay in stupor inside his lofty tent hung around with a golden net:

> Genam ða wundenlocc
> scyppendes mægð   sceapne mece,
> scurum heardne . . .   (77b–9a)

> [Then the Creator's maiden
> with curly hair took a sharp blade,
> hard from battles . . .]

Here the poem's protagonist is referred to as 'wundenlocc' and 'scyppendes mægð', neither of which epithets seems to derive from the source text: the reference to the Creator underlines the Christian interpretation of this deuterocanonical book, and Judith's transformation from a chaste widow to a maiden of elfin radiance ('ælfscinu', 14a) may well be unique to the Old English poem. The

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46 Gardner, 'Old English Kenning', p. 111. For expressions for swords in Old English poetry, see further Brady, '"Weapons" in *Beowulf*'; and Overing, *Language, Sign and Gender*, pp. 33–67.

47 See further Frank, 'Some Uses of Paronomasia', pp. 211–15.

attention paid to the protagonist's hair (repeated at 103b) seems to mark her both racially and sexually.[48] The juxtaposition of two or more references, as exemplified by the description of Judith above, is known as variation. This poetic technique allowed Old English poets to increase the semantic density of their work without complicating syntax structure – the passage just cited, for example, is a simple sentence having a verb + subject + object construction. Likewise, the object of this sentence consists of two juxtaposed epithets informing that the sword wielded by Judith not only had a sharp edge but had also been hardened from earlier strife. As a stylistic device, variation must have helped Old English poets not only to pack synonyms into a small textual space but also to slow down the progression of the narrative as desired.

Variation is very common in Old English poetry, and it has been identified by Frederick Klaeber as 'by far the most important rhetorical figure, in fact the very soul of the Old English poetical style'.[49] While variation seems to be a trope native to Anglo-Saxon poetry, generations of religious poets since Cædmon took advantage of this rhetorical device. Judith's prayer immediately preceding the decapitation, for instance, begins with an address to God:

> Ic ðe, frymða god   ond frofre gæst,
> bearn alwaldan,   biddan wylle
> miltse þinre   me þearfendre,
> ðrynesse ðrym.   (*Judith*, 83–6a)

> [I wish to ask you, god of creation
> and spirit of comfort, son of the all-ruler,
> to have mercy on me in dire straits,
> glory of the Trinity.]

In this passage variation is used not only to name the Father, the Holy Spirit and the Son but also to conclude this simple sentence with an explicit reference to the resplendent Trinity.

While variation pertains to repetition of sentence elements within the clause, other stylistic features of Old English poetry concern verbal repetition at larger levels. For instance, the term 'appositive style' has been suggested by Fred C. Robinson to describe the *Beowulf* poet's use of parataxis in placing divergent words, ideas and themes so that the ultimate interpretation of juxtaposed elements would be entrusted to individual readers. A prime example of such a 'double perspective' is Hrothgar's 'sermon' (lines

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48 Estes, 'Feasting with Holofernes', pp. 335, 345–6.
49 Klaeber (ed.), *Beowulf*, p. lxv.

1700–84), in which the Danish king admonishes against 'overweening pride, avarice and irascible violence'. While some readers, both then and now, might read this passage 'as a Christian homily on the Seven Deadly Sins', a closer examination would reveal that 'there is nothing in the speech that is not equally accordant with Germanic pre-Christian piety'.[50]

The general tendency among Old English poets to avoid a linear progression of narrative is sometimes reflected in their practice of returning to earlier references in the text. This type of organization came under close scrutiny in the mid-twentieth century, when structuralist analyses of Old English poems led to the recognition of various patterns, many of which were named after the images they provoked. The 'envelope pattern' was among the 'larger rhetorical patterns' proposed by Adeline Courtney Bartlett in 1935. This construct pertains to a symmetrical arrangement of material to provide the sense of 'logical completeness'. One such example is found in the portion of *The Battle of Maldon* where a Viking messenger addresses Bryhtnoth (lines 25–8). This brief passage begins with a reference to the former standing on one side of the river – 'þa stod on stæðe' [then (he) stood on the shore] – and ends with a reference to the latter standing on the other: 'þær he on ofre stod' [where he stood on the bank].[51] In 1983 John D. Niles proposed the term 'ring composition' to underline the prominence in Old English poetry of a 'chiastic design' by which 'the last element in a series in some way echoes the first, the next to the last the second, and so on'.[52] As *Beowulf* attests, an entire poem may be subsumed under such a construct.

Formulas and orality

While the repetitive nature of Old English poetic diction has always attracted the attention of scholars, the issue gained momentum with the rise of the oral-formulaic theory in the mid-twentieth century. The investigation of poetic practice in oral culture has its beginnings in Homeric studies. In his ground-breaking publication of 1795, *Prolegomena to Homer*, F. A. Wolf took a historicist approach to the Homeric question: given the evidence that the circulation of Homeric verse had antedated the introduction of writing to Greek culture, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* could not have derived from the written work of a single author but instead from 'the ancient poems of the Ionians'. Consequently, 'the Homer that we hold in our hands now is not the one who flourished in the mouths of the Greeks of his own day, but one variously altered,

50 Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*, pp. 32–3.
51 A. C. Bartlett, *Larger Rhetorical Patterns*, pp. 9–10.
52 Niles, *Beowulf: The Poem and Its Tradition*, p. 152.

interpolated, corrected and emended' by later scholars who reconceived his poetry in written form.[53]

Wolf's diachronic concept of orality, like many other constructs of historicism from the long nineteenth century, was recast into a synchronic model in the twentieth century. Between 1933 and 1935 the American classicist Milman Parry conducted extensive fieldwork in the former Yugoslavia to collect data from South Slavic oral poets. After Parry's untimely death, the project was taken over by his former student Albert B. Lord, whose book of 1960, *The Singer of Tales*, became an inspiration for generations of scholars engaged in the study of orality. Parry and Lord's theory of oral poetry places emphasis on the use of formulas and formulaic expressions functioning as a 'special technique of composition which makes rapid composing in performance possible'.[54]

As early as 1953 this anthropological model was applied to Old English poetry by Francis P. Magoun, Jr. Today his essay 'The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry' is best remembered for its analysis of the first twenty-five lines of *Beowulf*, according to which 'some seventy per cent of the text of this passage does occur elsewhere'.[55] Magoun's work met with approval from Lord, who in *The Singer of Tales* used this and other related studies to surmise that '*Beowulf* was composed orally'.[56] Magoun's essay encouraged further study of Old English poetry in the light of the oral-formulaic model, which in turn led to modification of some of the theory's basic assumptions. Larry D. Benson, for instance, made a powerful argument for decoupling the 'oral' and the 'formulaic' components of this model by proving the highly formulaic nature of the *Meters of Boethius*, a purely literary poetic composition.[57] Old English formulas may have their origin in preliterate culture, but they could be adopted by literate poets to cultivate a formulaic style.

The most widely accepted definition of Old English formula today is probably the one suggested by Donald K. Fry: 'a group of words, one half-line in length, which shows evidence of being the direct product of a formulaic system'.[58] Fry's definition may seem tautological in its conceptualization of formulas as products of formulaic systems, but the key here is the identification of the formulaic unit as the half-line and, further, the flexible nature of

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53 Wolf, *Prolegomena to Homer*, pp. 204, 209.
54 Lord, *Singer of Tales*, p. 17.
55 Magoun, 'Oral-Formulaic Character', p. 450.
56 Lord, *Singer of Tales*, p. 198.
57 See L. D. Benson, 'Literary Character'.
58 Fry, 'Old English Formulas and Systems', p. 204.

formulas within this framework. To take Cædmon's *Hymn* for an example, all of its variant forms attested in the manuscripts produced in the Anglo-Saxon period and the decades immediately following fall within the framework of half-lines.[59] The most famous variant reading in the *Hymn* occurs at 5b, for which two major types have been identified: *eorðan bearnum* [for children of the earth] and *ylda bearnum* [for children of men].[60] Because the so-called *eorðan*-group and the *ylda*-group (each of which includes dialectally divergent spellings of the lexeme in question) are attested in the Northumbrian and West Saxon versions of the poem, these variants may be considered as products of the formulaic system 'genitive noun + *bearnum*'. Prosodically, both *eorðan bearnum* and *ylda bearnum* alliterate on the same sound (i.e., vowels) and yield the same metrical pattern (basic type A).

Lexical variation in Cædmon's *Hymn* is examined in greater detail by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe. In her *Visible Song* she employs the concept of residual orality – that 'literacy does indeed restructure consciousness but that the process is quite slow' – to explain why the records of the poem 'show a high degree of freedom' when the transmission takes place within the Old English Bede, whereas 'the text is subject to little variation' when the poem is transmitted as a gloss to the Latin original.[61] It seems that the Anglo-Saxons experienced a phase of transitional literacy during which even scribes may have felt entitled to rework vernacular poetic texts at the formulaic level.

When we turn our attention to non-formulaic portions of the *Hymn*, one variant reading in particular attracts our attention. In the earliest known manuscript of the Old English Bede, Tanner 10, the poem begins with 'nu sculon'.[62] In the second-oldest surviving manuscript witness of the poem in the Old English Bede, the text still begins with 'nu sculan', but these two words are now separated by the pronoun *we* 'added above the line with caret'.[63] In the two late versions of the Old English Bede, the *Hymn* begins with 'nu we' written together.[64] That the collocation 'nu sculon' probably comprised the original opening of the *Hymn* may be inferred from the fact

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59 See O'Donnell (ed.), *Cædmon's 'Hymn'*, pp. 215–30, with the text of the *Hymn*, p. 222.
60 See Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, pp. xcvii–c. For details, see O'Donnell (ed.), *Cædmon's 'Hymn'*, pp. 206–12.
61 O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*, pp. 6, 46.
62 For Tanner 10, see Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 351 (s. x[1]).
63 O'Donnell (ed.), *Cædmon's 'Hymn'*, p. 224. For the manuscript in question (Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 279, B), see Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 354 (s. xi[in.]).
64 O'Donnell (ed.), *Cædmon's 'Hymn'*, pp. 215, 218. For the manuscripts in question (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 41, and Cambridge, University Library, MS Kk.3.18), see Ker's *Catalogue*, nos. 32 (s. xi[1]) and 23 (s. xi[2]), respectively.

that neither of the two oldest known versions of the poem, both in Latin manuscripts from the eighth century, has an expressed subject, whereas all later versions of the *Hymn*, whether glossed or integrated, Northumbrian or West Saxon, include *we* or a conjectural form of *we*.[65] This chronologically consistent variation on the opening of Cædmon's *Hymn* seems to be a reflection of the gradual weakening of residual orality. In an oral setting, the implied subject of 'nu sculon herigean' (Bede's 'nunc laudare debemus') would have been easily understood as the first-person *we* (*HE*, IV.24, p. 416). But the immediacy of the speaker's invitation addressed to the audience may have become less obvious with the spread of vernacular literacy. As written Old English texts became more and more iterable, their referents came to depend solely on their linguistic encoding. Based on the manuscript evidence, the period of transition in which the collocation 'nu sculon' finally came to be considered textually deficient and needed to be 'emended' to 'nu **we** sculon' seems to coincide with the period when the four major poetic codices were produced to anthologize vernacular poems.

Prosody

The alliterative long line

Of all the prosodical features of Old English poetry, by far the most fundamental is the construction of long lines by means of alliteration, that is, repetition of the initial sounds of metrically stressed syllables. Alliterative long lines are used in poetry composed in Old Saxon, Old Norse and Old High German as well. Alliterative verse may have its beginnings in a sound change in the prehistoric Germanic language, which shifted word stress to the first syllable of each root.[66] The oldest known example of an alliterative long line is the Gallehus inscription on a drinking horn from around 400 CE. This runic text offers a good example of double alliteration, having two alliterating words in the first half of the line:

ek**h**lewagastiR : **h**oltijaR : **h**orna : tawido :

[I, Hlewagast, Holt's son, made the horn][67]

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65 For variant readings in Cædmon's *Hymn*, see further O'Donnell (ed.), *Cædmon's 'Hymn'*, pp. 215–30.

66 See A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, chap. 2; and, further, Minkova, *Alliteration and Sound Change*, pp. 22–4.

67 Russom, *Beowulf and Old Germanic Metre*, p. 1.

In addition to alliteration, a number of prosodical devices are occasionally found in Old English poetry. Rhymes are used in a section of *Elene* (lines 1236–50), where Cynewulf begins his 'self-portrait' with the following lines:

> Þus ic frod ond fus   þurh þæt fæcne hus
> wordcræftum wæf   ond wundrum læs,
> þragum þreodude   ond geþanc reodode
> nihtes nearwe.   (*Elene*, 1236–9a)

> [Thus old and eager to leave because of my wretched body,
> I have woven with word-skills and assembled wonders,
> sometimes deliberated and arranged my thought
> with care in the night.]

The Riming Poem of the Exeter Book is the only known example of Old English verse in which both rhyme and alliteration are consistently used.[68]

A stanzaic structure is recognizable in a number of poems, including *Deor*. In this strophic lyric, the end of each 'stanza' is marked with the refrain 'þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg!' [that (hardship) passed, so may this one!]. Single half-lines are found sporadically in the Old English poetic corpus. These two prosodical features have been associated with Scandinavian verse. In the nineteen-line *Wulf and Eadwacer*, which occurs immediately after *Deor* in the manuscript, a somewhat irregular stanzaic structure is formed by four single half-lines, including the refrain 'ungelic[e] is us' [we are different] occurring in lines 3 and 8.[69]

Metre

The metrical unit of Old English poetry is the half-line rather than the long line.

The well-known five types were first proposed by the great neogrammarian Eduard Sievers. They are arranged roughly in the order of frequency:

A   / x | / x
B   x / | x /
C   x / | / x
D   / | / \ x
     / | / x \
E   / \ x | /

[68] See further Fulk, *History of Old English Meter*, pp. 362–8.
[69] See, *inter alia*, Bliss, 'Single Half-Lines'; and Klinck (ed.), *Old English Elegies*, pp. 43–9.

In this diagram, the symbol <_/_> stands for primary metrical stress, <__> for secondary metrical stress and <x> for no metrical stress. The vertical line < | > may be described as a foot division.[70] In the following, each type is illustrated with an example:[71]

```
        / x  /    x
A       ēce drihten [eternal lord] (Cædmon's Hymn, 8a)

         x / x       /
B       hē ǣrest sceōp [he first created] (Cædmon's Hymn, 5a)

        x    /     / x
C       oft Scyld Scēfing [often Scyld Scefing] (Beowulf, 4a)

          /   /  \  x
D       frēa ælmihtig [lord almighty] (Cædmon's Hymn, 9b)

         /   /   x  \
        lāð lēodgewin [hostile strife] (Juliana, 201a)

          /  \   x    /
E       moncynnes weard [guardian of mankind] (Cædmon's Hymn, 7b)
```

Alliterative verse accommodates greater metrical variety than does syllabic verse, and the five types should be regarded as no more than basic patterns. That these five are prototypes nonetheless may be inferred, somewhat paradoxically, from the Latin portion of macaronic verse. In the following example, taken from the concluding section of *The Phoenix* (675–7), the Latin phrases, each forming a complete half-line, seem to imitate the basic A type:[72]

```
      x  /    ⏜/ x  /    / x / x
      gesēon sigora frēan   sine fīne,

      x    x   / / x     / x x  / x
      ond him lof singan   laude perenne,

      /  x  x  / x     / x / x
      ēadge mid englum.   Allēlūiā.
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[(There we may) see the lord of victories without end
and sing him praise in ever-lasting laud,
happy among the angels. Hallelujah.][73]

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70 Sievers, *Altgermanische Metrik*, pp. 29, 31. Type E has been simplified.
71 Here and elsewhere in the rest of the section on metre, long vowels and long diphthongs are marked with a macron < ¯ >.
72 For the metrical status of Latin half-lines in Old English macaronic verses, see further Cain, 'Phonology and Meter'.
73 The symbol < ⏜/ > stands for a resolved long syllable, that is, an accented short syllable made to carry metrical stress by being combined with its immediately following unaccented syllable. For resolution, see, e.g., Bliss, *Metre of Beowulf*, pp. 27–35.

In scanning Old English verse, we need to apply a number of devices to make individual half-lines conform to the five types.[74] Most importantly, the symbol <x> stands for any number of unstressed syllables. In the following examples, clusters of unstressed syllables occupy the first and second <x> positions of a type B half-line and the first <x> position of a type C half-line, respectively:

> x   x x   x   / x x   /
> þēah ðe him on healfa gehwām   [even though on each of
>   their sides]   (*Exodus*, 209a)

> x   x   /   /   x
> þe him god sealde [which God gave him]   (*Daniel*, 606a)

The past fifty to sixty years have seen a surge of interest in Old English metre, and we are now equipped with not only ample analytical data but also a 'bewildering array of competing modern theories'.[75] Almost all of the theories nonetheless use Sievers as a point of departure. The empirical tradition of Old English metrics, which began with Sievers, has been enhanced by a number of scholars. A. J. Bliss has rendered Sievers' five types into a hierarchical classification by using, among others, the position of syntactic break within the half-line.[76] Although Sievers examined alliterative poems composed in early Germanic languages at large, his metrical system is based primarily on Old English poetry in general and *Beowulf* in particular. R. D. Fulk's *History of Old English Meter* has added diversity to the subject by expanding the corpus to other Old English poems and introducing phonological laws as possible criteria for determining relative dates of composition among individual poems.

Sievers' system of Old English metre is based on the assumption that the half-line normally consists of four positions or *Glieder*, each of which is occupied by <_/_>, <__> or <x>. This four-position theory helps us distinguish metrical patterns that are predictable variations within the system from metrical patterns that are irregular or anomalous. One such irregularity, though not uncommon in Old English poetry, is anacrusis, an extra-metrical position <x> added to the beginning of a half-line in type A or another type that begins with a stressed syllable. For example:

> x   / x x   / x
> in mǣgþa gehwǣre [in each generation]   (*Beowulf*, 25a)

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74 For a useful introduction to the scansion of Old English verse, see, e.g., Terasawa, *Old English Metre*.

75 Cable, *English Alliterative Tradition*, p. 60. For a useful survey of metrical theories, see Stockwell and Minkova, 'Prosody'.

76 Bliss, *Metre of Beowulf*, esp. pp. 122–8.

Such an 'extrametrical prelude to the verse' is mostly a monosyllabic preposition or prefix.[77]

An extra-metrical position may occur between the two primary stresses of a type D verse:

> / x / \   x
> sīde sǣnæssas [wide head-lands]   (*Beowulf*, 223a)
>
> / x / x   \
> enta ǣrgeweorc [ancient work of the giants] (*Beowulf*, 1679a)

Bliss has observed that, at least in *Beowulf*, such extended type D half-lines (type D*) are restricted to a-verses with double alliteration.[78]

There is also a large group of half-lines that have only three positions:

> x x x x x / x
> þā gȳt hīe him āsetton [they further placed (over) his (head)] (*Beowulf*, 47a)
>
>   x x x   / \
> mē þone wælrǣs [for me the deadly onslaught]   (*Beowulf*, 2101a)

Both Sievers and Bliss accept such three-positioned half-lines (the former's type A3 and the latter's type 'a' light verse) as a permissible if irregular metrical pattern.[79] Type A3 half-lines are found almost exclusively in a-verses, and they often mark the beginning of a clause with a long cluster of unstressed syllables.

Some recent work on Old English metre employs linguistic theory to postulate the existence of two feet in each half-line. The so-called two-foot theory may accommodate some of the patterns that cannot be explained by four-position theory. For example, Geoffrey Russom treats the extended type D half-line as a combination of two feet, either Sx/Ssx or Sx/Sxs (in which <S> stands for a fully stressed syllable and <s> for a syllable with secondary stress). He also explains type A3 as a half-line consisting of two feet, either xx/Sx or xx/Ss.[80]

Extra-long half-lines known as hypermetric verses occur in Old English poetry, sometimes in groups and sometimes individually.[81] In the following long line, taken from *The Dream of the Rood* (line 39),

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77 *Ibid.*, p. 40.
78 *Ibid.*, pp. 57–9.
79 Sievers, *Altgermanische Metrik*, p. 33; Bliss, *Metre of Beowulf*, pp. 61–2, 122.
80 Russom, *Beowulf and Old Germanic Meter*, pp. 21–2. Stockwell and Minkova postulate 'suppressed lifts (silent ictus)' for the beginnings of half-lines in type A3 ('Prosody', pp. 68–9).
81 A useful list of Old English hypermetric verses is found in Pope, *Rhythm of Beowulf*, pp. 100–4.

x ⌒ x x x x / ◡ x   x x / / \ x
ongyrede hine þā geong hæleð,   (þæt wæs god ælmihtig)

[then the young hero unclothed himself (that was God almighty)]

the first half-line may be considered a hypermetric verse with three metrically stressed words and the second half-line a type D verse with syntactically atypical disyllabic anacrusis. In comparison, the corresponding long line in the runic inscription on the Ruthwell Cross is considerably shorter:

. .   ⌒ x   ⌒   / / \   x
[. .]geredæ hinæ   ḡod ǣlmeȝttig

[God almighty unclothed himself][82]

If we supply a prefix, such as *on-*, for the missing portion at the beginning, this alliterative long line is made up of a regular type B half-line and a regular type D half-line. The comparison of these two lines helps us understand the making of hypermetric verses. *The Dream of the Rood* 39a begins with the two lexemes comprising the a-verse of the normal long line just cited (*ongyrede hine*), but it goes on to supply an adverb (*þā*) and a subject noun phrase (*geong hæleð*). If hypermetric verses can be formed by augmenting regular half-lines with additional elements, both stressed and unstressed, it is not altogether surprising that most of them cannot be fitted into the five types.[83] Given their ubiquity, however, hypermetric verses may best be accepted as a metrical option available to the poet, even though they do not conform to the norm of Old English metre, whether understood in terms of four positions or two feet.[84]

Prosodical syntax

In Old English poetry, syntactic units have a tendency to fall within prosodical boundaries: poems as a whole and most poetic paragraphs begin with the beginning of a long line and end at the end of a long line; sentences and clauses usually begin at the beginning of a half-line and end at the end of a half-line; many syntactic phrases – nominal, prepositional, adjectival – coincide with half-lines.

 In a given clause, words carrying metrical stress may occur in any position and virtually in any order. Such syntactic freedom is possible, probably because metrically stressed elements are protected by the framework of half-lines, which functions as a metrical (and often formulaic) unit. In contrast,

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82 Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, p. 115.
83 See, e.g., Stockwell and Minkova, 'Prosody', pp. 76–7.
84 Hypermetric verses have attracted considerable attention, e.g., Pope, *Rhythm of Beowulf*, pp. 97–158; Bliss, *Metre of Beowulf*, pp. 88–97; Russom, *Beowulf and Old Germanic Meter*, pp. 59–63; and Bredehoft, *Early English Metre*, pp. 51–7.

metrically unstressed elements have much less syntactic freedom. Because lexemes with heavy semantic weight must always carry metrical stress, only a small number of lexemes may occur as metrically unstressed elements in Old English poetry. These include certain prepositions, pronouns, adverbs and finite verbs. Conjunctions and relative pronouns are the only grammatical categories that are never given metrical stress.

Metrically unstressed elements may be divided into two groups, depending on their syntactic status within the clause. The first group consists of attached unstressed elements – so called because they are syntactically associated with words or phrases immediately following: e.g., prepositions and adjectival pronouns (both occurring immediately before nouns or noun phrases), the negative particle *ne* (before finite verbs) and co-ordinating conjunctions (before words or phrases). When more than one attached unstressed element occurs in the same position, they must be arranged in set order.

The second group consists of detached unstressed elements – so called because they are syntactically independent at the clause level: e.g., sentence adverbs, subordinating conjunctions, finite verbs and nominal pronouns functioning as subjects or objects. In a given clause, detached unstressed elements must occur either immediately before the first stressed elements:

us ge′writu ′secgeað[85] [the Scriptures tell us]   (*Genesis A*, 2612b)

or immediately following:

′heard **wæs** ′hinsið [the departure was difficult]   (*The Descent into Hell*, 7a)

Of the two patterns, the former is far more common in Old English.[86] When more than one detached unstressed element occurs in the same position, they must be arranged in set order.

Prosodical syntax is observed throughout the Old English poetic corpus, including translations from Latin (e.g., *The Judgement Day II*), Old Saxon (*Genesis B*) and Old English prose (the *Meters of Boethius*). In order to illustrate how different types of words are arranged in poetic clauses, I have analysed below a passage from *Genesis B* (599–606a); here detached unstressed elements are marked with single underlines, and attached unstressed elements with double underlines; clause boundaries are marked with vertical lines:

85 Here and in the rest of the section on prosodical syntax, the symbol < ′ > is placed immediately before a metrically stressed syllable.
86 Hans Kuhn was the first to note the placement of detached unstressed elements ('Zur Wortstellung und -betonung'). See further Momma, *Composition of Old English Poetry*, pp. 55–75.

Heo þa þæs ʹofætes ʹæt, | ʹalwaldan ʹbræc
ʹword <u>and</u> ʹwillan. | Ða meahte heo ʹwide geʹseon
þurh þæs ʹlaðan ʹlæn | þe hie <u>mid</u> ʹligenum beʹswac,
ʹdearnenga beʹdrog, | <u>þe hire</u> <u>for his</u> ʹdædum ʹcom, |

þæt hire þuhte ʹhwitre   ʹheofon <u>and</u> ʹeorðe,
<u>and eall þeos</u> ʹworuld ʹwlitigre,   <u>and</u> geʹweorc ʹgodes
ʹmicel <u>and</u> ʹmihtig, | þeah heo hit <u>þurh</u> ʹmonnes geʹþeaht
<u>ne</u> ʹsceawode. |

[She then ate of the fruit, broke the almighty's
word and will. Then she could see far and wide,
through the aid of the enemy who had deceived her with lies,
seduced her stealthily, that which came to her because of his doings,
so that heaven and earth seemed brighter to her,
and all this world more beautiful, and God's creation
great and powerful, even though she did not see it
through human capacity.]

In this passage, all of the detached unstressed elements are placed at the beginning of clauses. When two or more detached unstressed elements occur in one position, they are arranged according to set order. In the following, a personal pronoun in the nominative precedes a personal pronoun in the accusative:

<div align="center">

þeah**heo hit** <u>þurh</u> ʹmonnes geʹþeaht (605b)

</div>

When a cluster of detached unstressed elements includes a personal pronoun and a finite verb, no other element may come between them. The relative order of the two varies, as the verb may precede the personal pronoun:

<div align="center">

Þa**meahte heo** ʹwide geʹseon (600b)

</div>

or follow it:

<div align="center">

þæt**hire þuhte** ʹhwitre (603a)

</div>

Adverbs may occur either before or after pronouns and finite verbs:

<div align="center">

Heo þa <u>þæs</u> ʹofætes ʹæt (599a)

Ða meahte heo ʹwide geʹseon (600b)

</div>

Subordinating conjunctions and relative pronouns precede all other detached unstressed elements and occur in the opening of a clause.

All of the attached unstressed elements in this passage occur immediately before the word or phrase with which they have syntactic connection. They include prepositions:

<div align="center">

þe hie **mid** ʹligenum beʹswac (601b)

</div>

adjectival pronouns:

<p align="center">Heo þa <u>**þæs**</u> ′ofætes ′æt (599a)</p>

the negative particle *ne*:

<p align="center"><u>**ne**</u> ′sceawode (606a)</p>

and co-ordinating conjunctions:

<p align="center">′heofon <u>**and**</u> ′eorðe (603b)</p>

When two or more attached unstressed elements occur in one position, they are arranged according to set order. For instance, a preposition precedes an adjectival pronoun:

<p align="center">þe hire <u>**for his**</u> ′dædum ′com (602b)</p>

and the adjectival *eall* precedes the demonstrative pronoun:

<p align="center">and <u>**eall þeos**</u> ′woruld ′wlitigre (604a)[87]</p>

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have examined the genre, style and prosody of Old English poetry. While our investigation was based on a relatively small body of literature, amounting roughly to 30,000 lines of poetry in modern editions, we were able to observe formal features of Old English verse and assess their relative significance in a number of areas.

The poetic lexicon is one such area. While late Anglo-Saxon England witnessed the production of the four major poetic codices, in which specialized words and phrases shine like precious gems, this was also a period that promoted the practical use of Old English verse. Poems found in late manuscripts are often faithful renditions of Latin texts (e.g., 'homiletic' and 'liturgical' verses) and of Old English prose and glosses (e.g., the *Meters of Boethius* and the metrical psalms).[88] As exemplified by *The Judgement Day II*, the *Meters of Boethius* and the metrical psalms, Old English verses exhibit a tendency to accept prosaic vocabulary somewhat liberally when they are close translations from sources other than vernacular poetry.[89] But even *The Battle of Maldon*, which recounts a relatively recent event in a tone reminiscent of heroic poetry, uses far fewer poetic compounds than such poems as *Beowulf* and

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87 For prosodical syntax, see further Momma, *Composition of Old English Poetry*.
88 See Godden and Irvine (eds.), *Old English Boethius*, vol. 1, pp. 146–51; and Toswell, 'Relationship of the Metrical Psalter'.
89 These three texts are identified by Stanley as verses characterized by their free admission of prose words ('Prosaic Vocabulary', esp. p. 387).

The Battle of Finnsburh. Decrease in the use of poetic vocabulary in later compositions by necessity led to the simplification of metre, since compounds account for the majority of half-lines in type D, type E and certain subtypes of A. In *The Battle of Maldon*, half-lines of types D and E comprise 'less than 10 percent of the total', and 96 per cent of the b-verses are basic two-word type A, such as *heardne mece* [167b; hard blade].[90]

Variation has a prominent role in some of the later poems (e.g., *The Creed*, *The Death of Edward*) but not in others. The poet of the metrical portion of the Paris Psalter, for instance, preferred adverbial intensifiers to satisfy alliterative requirements. The following passage is a rendition of a portion of Psalm 118:25–6 ('vivifica me secundum verbum tuum. Vias meas enuntiavi, et exaudisti me'):

> do me <u>æfter þinum</u> ′wordum   ′**wel** ge′cwician.
> <u>Ic þe</u> ′wegas ′mine   ′**wise** ′secge,
> <u>and þu me</u> ge′hyrdest   ′**holde** ′mode

> [quicken me **well** according to thy words.
> I **wisely** declare to you my ways,
> and you have heard me with **gracious** mind]

In each of these long lines, alliteration in the b-verse is conveyed by an adverb or adverbial phrase that matches the alliteration in the a-verse carried by a noun or a verb translated from the Latin: *wel* [well] paired with *wordum* (from *verbum*); *wise* [wisely] paired with *wegas* (from *vias*); and *holde* [with gracious (mind)] paired with *gehyrdest* (from *exaudisti*). The Psalter poet's frequent use of common adverbs and conscious avoidance of poetic diction, however, resulted in 'the erosion of the system of rank, and the substantial destruction of the formulaic system'.[91] Although the poet still held closely to the long-line structure and prosodical syntax, his verses 'display a variety of metrical faults'.[92] Even his use of auxiliary verbs seems to reinforce the general impression that 'he was an unimaginative and scarcely competent versifier'.[93] As late Old English poems shed formal features that had been salient in previous generations, the intricate texture of 'classical' verse came undone.

The Anglo-Saxons nonetheless seem to have kept an alliterative tooth ever close to their tongues. Old English prose writers are known to have applied alliteration to compositions typically intended for oral delivery. The best-known

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90 Fulk, *History of Old English Meter*, p. 260; Russom, 'Evolution of Middle English Alliterative Meter', p. 296.
91 Griffith, 'Poetic Language and the Paris Psalter', p. 182. See also Toswell, 'Relationship of the Metrical Psalter'.
92 Fulk, *History of Old English Meter*, p. 410.
93 Donoghue, *Style in Old English Poetry*, p. 35.

example of such occasional use of alliteration is probably Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, in which the archbishop of York piled alliterative phrase upon alliterative phrase to convey the sense of urgency in the face of the political crisis of the early eleventh century:

> ⁊ her syndan **w**iccan ⁊ **w**ælcyrian;
> ⁊ her syndan **r**yperas and **r**eaferas
> ⁊ woroldstruderas ⁊, hrædest is to cweþenne,
> **m**ana ⁊ **m**isdæda
> **u**ngerim **ea**rla.

> [and here are wizards and witches,
> and here are plunderers and robbers
> and spoliators and, to put it briefly,
> a countless number of all
> crimes and evil deeds.][94]

But the use of alliteration had already been familiar among some of the earlier vernacular writers. The second Vercelli homily, for instance, uses alliterative units comparable with poetic long lines to enhance the terrors of future judgement in its exposition of Doomsday:

> On þam dæge us bið æteowed
> se **o**pena heofon   ⁊ **e**ngla þrym
> ⁊ **ea**llwihtna hryre   ⁊ **eo**rþan forwyrht,
> **t**reowleasra gewinn   ⁊ **t**ungla gefeall,
> **þ**unorrada cyrm   ⁊ se **þ**ystra storm.

> [On that day, to us shall be revealed
> the gaping sky and the multitude of angels,
> and the ruin of all creatures and the criminality of the earth,
> the strife of the faithless and the falling of stars,
> the clamour of thunder and the dark storm.][95]

By far the most extensive use of alliteration is found in the work of Ælfric, as he developed a stately style of alliterative composition in the process of writing the two series of *Catholic Homilies* and the *Lives of Saints* during the last decade of the tenth century and the first decade of the eleventh.[96] Ælfric's alliterative style is particularly suited to extensive narratives, and it seems to

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94 Wulfstan, *Homilies*, p. 273. The passage has been rearranged according to alliterative phrasing.
95 Scragg (ed.), *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 56. The passage has been rearranged according to alliterative phrasing. A 'widely divergent' version of this homily recorded in CCCC 201 has been edited by Stanley as a mixture of verse and prose ('Judgement of the Damned', p. 364).
96 See Momma, 'Rhythm and Alliteration'.

find its full expression in his saints' Lives, which tend to be longer than his homilies. In the following excerpt taken from the *Passion of St Denis and his Companions*, Ælfric's narrative reminds us of some of the alliterative romances of the post-Conquest period:

> Þær com þa micel leoht to þæra martyra lice,
> and þæs bisceopes lic mid þam leohtes aras
> and nam his agen heafod, þe of-aheawen wæs
> uppan ðære dune, and eode him forð þanon
> ofer twa mila þam mannum onlocigendum
> his drihten herigende mid halgum lofsangum.

> [Then came a great light there to the martyrs' bodies,
> and the bishop's body rose in that light,
> and took his own head that had been cut off
> on the hill, and walked forth from there
> for two miles in the gaze of the men,
> praising his Lord with holy hymns.][97]

Whether or not Ælfric was a poet may be a question of greater import to our generation than to his. Since Ælfric's alliterative composition seems to have anticipated one strand of the poetic practice of post-Conquest England, however, it may well have been regarded as historical verse by readers in later periods.[98]

The latest poem included in the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records is *Durham*, a lyric composed in the tradition of the *encomium urbis* and dated to the first decade of the twelfth century.[99] By the early thirteenth century the vernacular poetry of England was no longer uniform. As the example of the *Orrmulum* attests, English writers had by then begun composing non-alliterative syllabic verse, while alliterative poetry had become open to various modifications. To take the *Brut* for an example, Lawman's extensive historical narrative abounds in alliteration and traditional poetic idioms, and yet this priest at King's Areley also wove numerous rhyming words into his stress-based long lines.[100] Thanks in part to such formal flexibility, alliterative verse continued to be employed by English poets for diverse poetic compositions for the remainder of the medieval period.

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97 Ælfric, *Lives of Saints*, vol. II, p. 186.
98 See further Bredehoft, *Early English Metre*.
99 Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, pp. xliii–xlv. See further Lerer, 'Old English and Its Afterlife', pp. 18–22.
100 See Johnson and Wogan-Browne, 'National, World and Women's History', pp. 94–104. For discussions of the relationship between Old and Early Middle English alliterative poetry, see, e.g., Cable, *English Alliterative Tradition*; Bredehoft, *Early English Metre*; and Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition*.

Chapter 12

Beowulf: a poem in our time

GILLIAN R. OVERING

Critical interest in *Beowulf* has reached, it would appear, an all-time high. The scope, variety and sheer volume of scholarship focused on this old poem continue to testify to its enduring appeal. In addition to burgeoning scholarship in traditional fields of inquiry, there are contemporary critical and interdisciplinary studies spanning postmodern to premodern (and back again), new translations of various kinds, including films and mixed media performances, and handbooks and companion volumes to help us interpret all of these.[1] The reissue of Frederick Klaeber's profoundly influential edition of the poem contains sections of 'interpretation' along with a welter of expansions and additions to Klaeber's insights. It is worth remembering, however, that when his first edition appeared in 1922, 'Klaeber had already begun work on revisions.'[2] He would continue with two more editions through the many personal hardships and pragmatic difficulties occasioned by the Second World War until his death in 1954.[3] The tide of continuity runs deep, and runs both ways: the poem continues to engage us and to challenge us to find new ways to ask familiar questions. The editors of the latest edition of Klaeber's work suggest that 'perhaps the most important audience of all is the implied (or fictional) audience that is generated by the rhetorical action of the text itself with each and every reading of it'.[4] What then remains to be said for *Beowulf* as a poem in our time, a poem for our time?

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1 E.g., Bjork and Niles (eds.), *Beowulf Handbook*; Fulk (ed.), *Interpretations of Beowulf*; Orchard, *Critical Companion to Beowulf*; and Joy *et al.* (eds.), *Postmodern Beowulf*. Films and internet sources include *Beowulf* (Baker, 2000), *Beowulf and Grendel* (Gunnarsson, 2005), *13th Warrior* (McTiernan, 1999), *Beowulf* (Zemeckis, 2008), www.beowulftranslations.net and www.bagbybeowulf.com. See also annual bibliographies in *OEN* and in *ASE*.
2 Fulk *et al.* (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, p. vii. All references to the poem are to this edition. Translations are drawn from a variety of sources in order to emphasize the multiple modes and ongoing nature of interpreting this poem; if not otherwise indicated, they are my own.
3 See *ibid.*, Helen Damico's foreword, pp. vii–ix.
4 *Ibid.*, p. clxxxviii.

In many respects, *Beowulf* is a poster-child for the aims, the scope and the challenges of this volume. The history, provenance and reception of the poem, as material and aesthetic object, and the history of scholarly interaction – not to mention obsession – with it, give it pride of place as a 'crossover' text, which reaches across and into the varied disciplinary domains of this period of early medieval literary history. How, then, to respond to the challenges of its multivalence? Although this chapter is indebted to a formidable and valuable scholarly context, it will not attempt to rehearse these myriad trajectories of scholarship on the poem; nor will it synthesize or generalize, or duplicate existing comprehensive studies.[5] It will consider instead how the poem's history meets ours, how its particular complexities and ambiguities challenge our own interpretive processes, and how our encounter with its difference might produce an expanded vision not only of *Beowulf* but of the cultural dimensions, embodiments and temporalities that it evokes. Consider, for example, the much examined question of the dating of the poem, yet the fact remains that we do not know, and may never know, just when the poem was written down.[6] As with the poem, so with its unidentified poet(s); indeed, the specificity of the word 'poet' is a linguistic shortcut. The complexities of early medieval authorship, construed as multiple, oral and literate, as cultural aggregate and artefact, are embedded in the convenient singularity of the term.[7] Similarly, the question of the hunt for a specific date, now 'narrowed' down to sometime between the mid-eighth and early eleventh centuries, might also be reframed differently. What or whose time does the poem inhabit? How does it articulate its own idea of history, and how does it place, embody and gender such temporalities? And what does it demand of us in order to make its dimensions critically accessible, even open to participation? Must we be able – and willing – to allow our senses of time and space and embodiment to be rearranged? The poem's very difficulty of definition invites, if not demands, a meditation on how to read, and on the role of the reader.

One of the premises of this chapter is that in order to meet the poem on its own terms we are indeed willing to take on the poem's difference, open to being changed by it, whatever critical or disciplinary approach we bring to it. This is not to wholly emphasize the affective role of the reader, although this

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5 See Orchard, *Critical Companion to Beowulf*, for the most recent comprehensive overview of *Beowulf* scholarship.
6 See *ibid*., pp. 12–56; and Fulk *et al*. (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, pp. clxii–clxxxvii.
7 See Fulk *et al*. (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, pp. xxv–xxxv for a summary; see also Frantzen, *Desire for Origins*.

has been increasingly acknowledged by *Beowulf* scholarship, from Howell Chickering's reminder that we 'ought also to remember how much of an act of present-day imagination our "historical criticism" really is' to a variety of affirmations of the postmodern critical inclusion of the personal.[8] It is to suggest that even as the poem itself confounds binary oppositional structures at every turn, we in turn aim to attenuate antithetical distinctions between constructs that are apposite, parallel or intersecting (or all three), such as affectivity and history, traditional philology and contemporary theory, or the subject and the object of study. If we cannot dissolve the boundaries between text and reader, between its past and our present, we can engage them in open-ended and creative interaction. This chapter will focus on three broad strands of inquiry as they are articulated across varied strands of scholarship, and it will place poetic language at the heart of all three. It will consider time, as it unfolds within the poem and in our time; it will consider space, as this is articulated within the historical and geographical co-ordinates of the poem; and it will consider bodies – including our own – and objects, as these are configured in the time and space of the poem. Even as these sections evolve, they will also undo any rigidly sequential or linear connections between them, and argue that the poem offers a radical reconfiguration of the interconnection of time, space and embodiment.

Time: when and whose is the now of the poem?

The connections among beings alone make time.
Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 77

Beginning students of *Beowulf* are frequently puzzled, or perhaps disoriented is more accurate, by the coexistence of so many disparate elements. Why give the plot (or one strand of it) away at line 85 and foretell the destruction of Heorot *not* at the hands of a Grendel? Why do the glory-seeking young Beowulf and his accompanying band of hand-picked adventurers thank God when they have a successful voyage to their monster-fight venue in Denmark? Why does the story of Wiglaf's sword 'pop up' just when he and Beowulf are in the middle of slaying the dragon at the end of the poem? Why are the Swedes such a problem towards the end of the poem and why is it so hard to figure out just who did what to whom and when, and why, if it is so difficult, does the poet insist on telling us about them at such length? Why does the uncomfortable, somewhat

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8 Chickering, Jr, 'Lyric Time', p. 483; see Joy *et al.* (eds.), *Postmodern Beowulf*, for critical approaches to the intersections of reader and text.

creepy feeling of the watery home of the monster-kin so often recall the scary otherness of the biblical apocalyptic lake? Is Grendel hairy, furry or scaly? What does it *mean* that 'heaven' swallows the smoke that rises from Beowulf's traditional Germanic non-Christian funeral pyre, but that no one has any idea where the ur-Dane Scyld Scefing's funeral boat ends up? Why do teachers of the poem so often receive papers on 'Beowulf as a Christ-figure'? How can the hero be an incorrigible glory-seeker whose death condemns his people to captivity and also 'manna mildust' – the gentlest of men (3181)? Why is it so hard to say anything conclusive about so many of these disparate elements in the poem, let alone about its central character?

The beginning student of the poem, I argue, encounters the same difficulties as the lifelong scholar; the poem has a habit of indeterminacy, an acceptance of contradiction, and a fluidity of definition on many levels. Time is one of these. How we understand how the poem makes meaning has a great deal to do with how we imagine its relation to its own time, its own 'now'. There is, however, no single definitive system of time governing its world of action or memory and their location in past, present or futurity. Instead the poem offers several possible understandings of time, and these, whether mythical, historical or biblical, are imagined in both linear and cyclical dimensions. The selection of students' questions cited above conjures not only the long-standing familiar debate about the dual presence of Christian and non-Christian value systems in the poem, but also how the 'now' is understood from either and both perspectives. What relation does the 'now' have to which past, present or future, or whose hereafter? If, as Giorgio Agamben suggests, 'every culture is first and foremost an experience of time, and no new culture is possible without an alteration in this experience', such alteration might appear as persistent temporal hybridities within the formation of a 'new' culture.[9] Which is to say that the poem is about, and netted within, religious and cultural transition, and is fielding a sophisticated array of perspectives – something that *Beowulf* scholars have been saying for a good while. Questions about which perspective finally controls memory, within and without the poem, have been increasingly replaced by an emphasis on understanding the nature of such hybridities, or just how the poem achieves the tensions and balances that it does. There will be no (one) answer to the question of why Beowulf and his band of men are so humbly prayerful, or where those funeral pyres and boats are headed.

9 Agamben, *Infancy and History*, p. 91.

It is hard, too, to pinpoint a prevailing cultural understanding of time within the Anglo-Saxon period. The works of scholars like Bede and Byrhtferth of Ramsey evidence a high degree of sophistication, engaging mathematical, computational, cosmological and historical principles.[10] Though knowledge of some Augustinian formulations of time as measured, sequential, or linear might have been limited to churchmen, nonetheless, for Chickering, such a sequential mode does govern the poem, even as it governs both Germanic and ecclesiastical thinking: 'both systems held to notions of the beginning and end of human time, and both saw time as flowing from the past to the future'.[11] Our experience of the poem is necessarily sequential as well. Time is passing for us, too, the 'now' continually disappearing as we read or listen. But the poem resists – and catches – this passing tide so that our experience of its time is not reduced to increment or mandated by sequence. It produces what Chickering has labelled a 'lyrical awareness' of time, a 'singingness' (a term that he insists has nothing to do with reconstructed lyres and the like). This is an attractive idea whose very elusiveness enables it to reverberate in several critical dimensions. 'Singingness' is intrinsic to '*how* we *hear* time passing in language' (my italics).[12] It resides in the mass and layering of repetitions in the poem, in the labyrinthine cross-references to themes, images, stories and sounds; and, to connect with the work of another quite different critic, Allen Frantzen, who focuses on the intertextual interplay of signs in the poem, it might also be found in silences, in stories not told, in words evoked but not heard.[13]

The story of Wiglaf's sword 'pops up' in the narrative present of the dragon fight, and offers a momentary, and visual, prism of past, present and future perspectives, all of which are further imbued with associations and memories, with stories concluded and those about to begin. If we 'hear time passing' as Wiglaf raises his sword, there is also an argument to be made for *seeing* time pass in terms of the iconic presence of the material objects in this poem. Where and when this prism comes into focus, or *when* we hear time 'passing' – I'll substitute 'happening' here – is the hard part to pin down. It is often a matter of pulling at a strand and seeing where it leads. But let's start at line 2585, with another sword. Facing his last challenge against the dragon, the old Beowulf is clearly in trouble, as his sword has failed him. While swords, with and without blades, are some of the most freighted objects in the poem,

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10 Bede, *De temporum ratione* (*The Reckoning of Time*, trans. Wallis); Byrhtferth, *Enchiridion*. See also Chapter 19 below.
11 Chickering, Jr, 'Lyric Time', p. 490.
12 *Ibid*., p. 493.
13 Frantzen, 'Writing the Unreadable *Beowulf*'.

overdetermined with histories, stories, glories and betrayals, they never help Beowulf. His swords habitually break, melt, or are simply made redundant because he is stronger than they are. The hero is seriously at odds with these cultural icons. One more failure in this regard might remind us of the wide and deep thematic fissure that characterizes this hero's curiously asymmetric relation to the entire world of the poem. But we are in the middle of a dragon fight – and attempting to focus on this sword strand. One man's sword weakens along with his boast: 'Hrēðsigora ne ġealp / goldwine Ġēata; gūðbill ġeswāc / nacod æt nīðe, swā hyt nō sceolde, / īren ǣrgōd' [2583–6; The gold-friend of the Geats boasted of no great victories: the war-blade had failed, naked at need, as it ought not to have done, iron good from old times].[14] Another man remembers the demands of kinship and hall culture, and takes up his sword:

> Ġemunde ðā ðā āre   þe hē him ǣr forġeaf,
> wīċstede weliġne   Wǣġmundinga,
> folcrihta ġehwylċ,   swā his fæder āhte;
> ne mihte ðā forhabban,   hond rond ġefēng,
> ġeolwe linde,   gomel swyrd ġetēah;
> þæt wæs mid eldum   Ēanmundes lāf   (2606–11)

[He remembered the honors that he gave him before,
the rich homestead of the Waegmunding clan,
the shares of common-land that his father had held,
and he could not hold back. His hand seized the shield,
yellow linden-wood; he drew the sword,
known to men as Eanmund's heirloom].[15]

This sword has a name ('Ēanmundes lāf'), a history and a story that must be told – now, apparently. It belongs in the 'now' of the narrative. Notwithstanding the imminence of the fiery breath of the dragon in the present of the narrative, this present must be both interrupted and reconnected; it also contains, imminently, past and futurity.

Wiglaf's father, Weohstan, so the story goes (2609–27), stripped the sword in battle from the dead body of Eanmund, brother of the Swedish king Eadgils. Onela, uncle of Eanmund, ceremonially awards it to Weohstan, withholding any comment on the patently unavenged death of his nephew Eanmund. Weohstan waits many years before passing this sword, and its history, on to his son Wiglaf, who tries it out for the first time when he goes to help

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14 Donaldson (trans.), *Beowulf*.
15 Chickering, Jr (trans.), *Beowulf*.

Beowulf. The completed past acts of killing and of giving, those years passing in waiting for readiness, the instant of Wiglaf's decision to act, the unfinished futurity of the act of vengeance – all of these comprise the now of this narrative moment. This may be the young Wiglaf's first time out – 'Þā wæs forma sīð / ġeongan cempan þæt hē gūðe rǣs / mid his frēodryhtne fremman sceolde' [2625–7; That was the first time that the young warrior had to perform in the rush of battle alongside his lord] – but a sense of layered experience, if not exact repetition, is palpable. The appearance of Wiglaf's sword and its history in this narrative moment is continuous with so many others, both close and distant in terms of the when of the narrative. In the relative distance, for example, we might associate the chronic disconnection of the hero and any sword, or the future trajectory of vengeance and the destruction of Beowulf's kingdom at the hands of the Swedes, or other swords and other histories that recall and foretell similar stories. Close up, and returning to my chosen 'strand', we see other aspects of continuity and connection. Under quite literal fire (2582–3) from the dragon, whose breath has already 'melted' his hall in 'fire-waves' ('brynewylmum mealt', 2326), the old warrior Beowulf's sword 'weakens' (2584); when the young Wiglaf seizes his narrative moment, 'Ne ġemealt him se mōdsefa, nē his mǣġes lāf / ġewāc æt wīġe' [2628–9; his spirit did not melt, nor his kinsman's heirloom weaken in battle]. Fire, failure, resolve, the dragon, the sword; the literal and the metaphorical, the material and the affective cross over – the line may even dissolve, as we shall see in our third section. This is one very limited example of the dizzyingly complex verbal design of the poem which allows these moments to recall each other, and to become invested in each other. Such continuity, both close and distant, is mediated and evoked by language, by verbal design.

Beowulf is an echo chamber of verbal patterns, repetitions and resonances, which have been much studied from many perspectives – from the role of the so-called 'digressions' to a host of oral-formulaic arguments, or from the aesthetic arguments of interlace to the postmodern postulates of fragmentation and intertextuality – to name only a few possibilities. The Old English language, with all its rich semantic vagaries and grammatical difference, is an important point of access to this complexity.[16] On both micro and macro levels, for example, the specific occurrence within the narrative of the many words and descriptive epithets for swords, and other material objects, triggers chains of semiotic connection and association where narrative moments recall each other and overlap. Such resonance becomes more powerful – indeed

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16 See Chapter 11 above.

more insistent – the more familiar one becomes with the larger design of the poem via its specific linguistic nuances.[17] There is no doubt that knowledge of the Old English language gives greater access to such nuances, but the beginning student reading the poem in any translation and the scholar focused on the overdeterminations of linguistic detail might ask similar questions about Wiglaf's sword and its narrative moment. Though *how* each might 'hear time passing' will have a different intensity, the momentary rupture of sequence remains exactly that – rupture, disorientation – but it is also a point of entry, a window onto a different temporality, a relocation in time.

How we enter this location is important. We have to take on its complexity and in doing so challenge assumptions that medieval people had no 'real' sense of time, that they lived in some form of continuous cyclical ahistorical present, or within a mythologically, ecclesiastically or biblically structured and equally ahistorical linear continuum, or assumptions that one view simply replaced the other.[18] The advent of monastic clocks in Anglo-Saxon England does not wholly recalibrate, or resituate, the Germanic 'now'. Moreover, while Wiglaf's sword occupies a present that is a focus for cyclical repetition and association, it is also squarely located within the linear bounds of the historical, evincing a clear sense of the *passage* of time, and experienced in this narrative moment as an inevitable sequence of causes and effects involving tribes, kings, individuals – and their swords. The poem's time operates across and beyond any binary configuration, and one manifestation of this is patently its 'sense of history', which according to Roberta Frank is sophisticated in the extreme. While tribal enmity and the motive of revenge control many trajectories of past, present and future event sequences, history as duration, passage and change is imagined with depth and surprising difference. Frank argues that the poem exhibits a strong awareness of the past, and a parallel awareness of the present in its often subtle understanding of anachronism – and how to avoid it. There is also a 'fascination with cultural diversity', an awareness of other and others' histories, even a 'liberal mentality' displayed in the poem's comparatively tolerant approach to the problem of unbaptized pagans, so little in evidence elsewhere in the Anglo-Saxon period.[19] Frank's influential argument eloquently makes the case for a time-savvy and historically aware *Beowulf*.

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17 See Overing, *Language, Sign and Gender*, pp. 33–67.
18 See Kleinschmidt, *Understanding the Middle Ages*, pp. 15–32; for a theoretical analysis, see Agamben, *Infancy and History*, pp. 91–105.
19 Frank, '*Beowulf* Poet's Sense of History', p. 171.

Accepting both the plurality and the sophistication of past conceptions of time undermines, in Kathleen Davis's argument, those 'very categories that make medieval/modern periodization possible. There is no single "medieval" conception of time and history.'[20] So, too, the poem offers a space to undo controlling distinctions between past and present temporalities; a space where moments of rupture and suspension can mutually reveal past and present perspectives, where our time can intersect with that of the poem. Such a space requires that we ask whether we are in or out of the poem's time, how we can meet the difference of this narrative now, how to relocate within it – questions that will return throughout the following discussion.

Space: when and where are the places of the poem?

> If time unfolds as change then space unfolds as interaction.
>
> Doreen Massey, *For Space*, p. 61

What kind of space is cleared within the narrative 'now' of *Beowulf* and how have critical questions shaped those spaces? The 'where' of the poem is often configured as the 'when', and assessments of time and history have had a great deal to do with how space, and place, have been imagined. Initially, then, space comes under the purview of time. The quest for a more or less specific date for the poem or its manuscript, for example, brings the poem into 'our' time by virtue of the pressures of hermeneutics, and the various investitures of scholars in their given times and places. But more importantly, the fixity of representation in time, while removing duration and change from our understanding of time, can also result in an attendant closing down of the dynamic of space, a point emphasized by cultural geographer Doreen Massey in *For Space*:

> Representation is seen to take on aspects of spatial*isation* [*sic*] in the latter's action of setting things down side by side; of laying them out as a discrete simultaneity. But representation is also in this argument understood as fixing things, taking the time out of them. The equation of spatialisation with the production of 'space' thus lends to space not only the character of a discrete multiplicity but also the characteristic of stasis.[21]

When space is represented as mere backdrop and agent for the specifications of time, it is seen negatively, its multiplicity and dynamism obscured.

20 K. Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, p. 104.
21 Massey, *For Space*, p. 23.

First, then, to examine some specifications of time before looking at their implications for spaces in the poem, one might argue that the questions we ask about dates – and about names, sources and emendations – bring us closer to the mode of the poem than the answers. Roberta Frank and John D. Niles, among others, have opened up the dating debate in this regard, bringing to bear the interdisciplinary purview of cultural studies criticism. The nuanced understanding of history in the poem is a function of the broad cultural question of 'when in the Anglo-Saxon period did pagans become palatable?'.[22] The poem's fifth- and sixth-century pagan Scandinavian setting, its geography, its value system, its personnel, intersect over a period of four hundred years with the later Anglo-Saxon cultural forces, aesthetic, political, even accidental, that eventually record it. The question of 'when' already moves into 'where', and into a new space of dynamic interrelation. The idea of *emplacement* in time is brought out in the title of Niles's essay 'Locating *Beowulf* in Literary History' where he expands the specific historical question of dating with other more open-ended ones, such as 'What work did the poem do?' or 'What are the cultural questions to which *Beowulf* is an answer?'[23] By redirecting attention away from the fact of a date as a discrete event, and thinking of the poem and its manuscript as social and ideological productions inseparable from factors of audience, we are bound to think in terms of overlay and multiplicity, to see the poem and poet as culturally and socially embedded constructs, and so to envision the operations of simultaneity. The question then becomes how we as readers combat the move towards the discrete. The poem appears to do many things at the same time, to inhabit various times with *continuity* – how can we?

The search to identify names in, and sources and analogues for, *Beowulf* offers a similar opportunity: this is not to devalue such scholarship but to suggest, again, that we value the questions raised because they bring us closer to the mode of the poem. One example can begin to make this case. As he recalls his past and his upbringing in King Hrethel's court, the old Beowulf tells a story about the king's sons, about Hæthcyn's accidental slaying of his brother Herebeald (2426–43). Some scholars argue that this piece of Danish history (if we are to believe Beowulf) is analogous to the mythological story of the slaying of the god Baldr by the blind Họðr. Klaeber disagreed and 'thought it a report of an ordinary incident that could easily happen in those Scandinavian communities and probably happened more

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22 Frank, '*Beowulf* Poet's Sense of History', p. 173.
23 Niles, 'Locating *Beowulf* in Literary History', p. 79.

than once'.[24] Other scholars suggest that this was a particular event that then gave rise to the myth, claiming the etymological connection between the names (Here-*beald* and *Baldr*, *Hæð*-cyn and *Hǫðr*), and the later thirteenth-century dating of *Snorra Edda*, a source for the Baldr story. The degree to which Snorri's myths or earlier redactions of them might have been known in Anglo-Saxon England in turn raises all kinds of questions about cultural exchange within the period, and about levels of interaction with the various waves of Scandinavian invaders and settlers.

This is a much abbreviated account of a rich tangle of scholarly view-points.[25] However, it is evident that this one story of the two brothers evokes time as possibly, and simultaneously, quotidian, historical, mythological, as personal recollection and as cultural memory. A further complicating factor here is that in addition to the story's connective and affective force, this strand of narrative evokes the acutely non-static experience of paradox. It has the capacity to confound and paralyse the poem's complex systems of social and personal accountability; it leads to Beowulf's well-known rumination on the devastating grief of a father who must endure a similar emotional stalemate, his recollection of his own grandfather Hrethel's death-by-heartbreak, and the attendant devaluing of halls, and hall culture itself, that results from both men's experience (2444–71). The story cuts deep, to the heart of the poem's endemic revenge motif, to the problems of familial and social shame, to lingering questions about the meaning of taking action and about the worth of violent action. Within the poem Beowulf's story is experienced and located in different times, and these are permeated not only by the reverberative force of deep emotion, but also by the discomfiting challenge of paradox. It stands, too, as an invitation without the poem to examine our own reading practice as we decide how *not* to decide on which package of answers leads to which discrete simultaneity, and enter a time that is always multiple and dynamic – and integrally connected to the operations of space.

Adjusting a sense of time to meet that of the poem, to relocate within that of the poem, involves seeing how its many dimensions of space are also implicated, how it inhabits space and defines place in equally dynamic ways. The elusive borderlines between concepts of space and place, and how or why those lines get drawn within the poem, offer, again, a striking challenge to critical assumptions about medieval people's circumscribed or static under-standing of space. Recent cultural geographical and postcolonial criticism on the 'new' complexities of the relation of space to modernity sometimes

24 Fulk *et al.* (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, p. xlvii.
25 *Ibid.*, pp. xlvii–xlviii. See also Orchard, *Critical Companion to Beowulf*, pp. 116–19.

assumes a flat, one-dimensional 'premodern' precursor, where space is conceived as already divided, bounded and separate, already specific – 'as local as place', as Massey puts it.[26] Massey is careful to point out that assumptions about past static, place-identified societies are often a product of nostalgic resistance to and anxieties about present globalization, and belie a response that is less 'backward-looking' than 'looking back to a past that never was'.[27] Nonetheless these debates can obscure the processes of space *becoming* place in premodern societies, and the essential fluidity of both concepts. Harald Kleinschmidt's schema for space in the Middle Ages, following Augustine's, offers a bit more flexibility: the space of daily experience, the space of regular communication and the space of the world. The first two can correspond, though not exclusively, to divisions of private and public, and the third is a theoretical concept; it is unowned, 'universal', uncategorized space, the specificity of the idea of a globe, for example, being a function of one dominant globalizing perception. As culturally relative constructs, these spaces are in flux, and the Church, of course, as it undermines the kin-group and redefines social structures, has a significant influence on the reconfiguration of all three categories. Kleinschmidt argues, however, that the one generally consistent factor in the early medieval world is that 'groups constituted space more frequently than space constituted groups'.[28]

As one of the most central of locations in *Beowulf*, the hall, and the spaces it creates or defines – or negates – is one productive place to interrogate these postulates about space. The poem gives us a detailed account of the genesis, building and destruction of one particular hall very early on. The space begins as an idea that 'comes into the mind' of Hrothgar ('Him on mōd bearn', 67). His individual imagination and martial achievements are translated before our eyes into their public attestation (67–85). Heorot becomes a named place, a venue, not only for skilled craftspeople and exotic materials – as the poet reminds us when Beowulf and Grendel all but destroy it (770–7) – proclaimed widely abroad to the generalized population of an unspecified 'middle earth', but also a space for the daily business of hall culture and its enactment, the giving of rings, the keeping of oaths, the pronouncements of law, the pleasures of feasting. Another equally intrinsic element of hall culture, endemic feuding, will destroy this space, and we see into a future where it goes up in flames (81–5). Anchored though it is in human endeavour, daily lives and sturdy building materials, Heorot the place retains a chimeric quality, where

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26 Massey, *For Space*, p. 66.
27 *Ibid*., p. 65.
28 Kleinschmidt, *Understanding the Middle Ages*, p. 36.

the becoming of space into place evolves and devolves: it is patently repre-
sented as being in process, as making and changing meaning. Moreover, such
spatial making and unmaking is imagined across time, as we connect
Hrothgar's past, present and future with these operations of space.

The dynamic creation of hall space is just that. While groups might
constitute place – Hrothgar, the Scyldings and Heorot are closely co-identified
in the poem – the great hall is not an unambiguously or distinctly public space,
a space of regular communication: 'Instead it made visible space as a category
of value which was to be determined by the groups that occupied it legit-
imately.'[29] When, then, is a hall not one? What is the nature of this hall space
when it is deserted by Hrothgar and regularly occupied by Grendel? When
Hrothgar takes the unprecedented step of giving control of Heorot over to the
young Beowulf (652–61), just what is changing hands? The hall in the old
Beowulf's story of his two cousins Herebeald and Haethcyn literally and
conceptually disintegrates, ceases to be a place. It is no longer a venue, not
just because of human desertion, but also because of the failure of the culture
it embodies to provide a space and a place from which to speak; it offers no
definition or marked parameters for meaningful human action. And what of
the not-quite or other-than human negotiation of space? The next section will
consider just how fluid are the boundaries between bodies, human or other-
wise, but such fluidity is also evident in the conception of one, other,
significant hall space, that of Grendel and his mother.

The Grendelkin inhabit a fairly elaborate space. It would appear to have
many of the physical characteristics of a great hall: it has a constructed aspect
('hrōfsele' [1515; vaulted roof]), a blazing fire, perhaps hard to maintain in an
underwater cavern (1516–17), the requisite cache of treasures (1613) and a
quantity of heirloom-quality armour (1557). It is lived-in space, a dwelling
('in þǣm wīcum', 1612), its inhabitants designated, by Beowulf, as 'hūses
hyrdas' [1666; house guardians], even as the poet designates Beowulf as
their 'hall-guest' ('seleġyst', 1545). Their space is specifically called a hall
('hofe', 1507; 'recede', 1572), and recognized as such by Beowulf, its form
familiar, though its ambiance alien: 'Đā se eorl onġeat / þæt hē [in] nīðsele
nāthwylcum wæs' [1512–13; Then the earl perceived that he was in some kind
of hostile hall]. As with the Grendelkin, so with their hall space; their hall is
consistently more and less recognizable, coming in and out of identifiable
focus. The hall culture it inscribes is a bit iffy, those treasures are not quite the
thing (Beowulf won't plunder as per usual), and nor is that armour, especially

29 *Ibid*., p. 42.

the great sword whose blade saves the hero and then melts away (1612–15). These items, though splendid, are not the usual warrior currency. The value(s) of this space and the legitimacy of its occupation – who and what constitute this space as a 'category of value' – are moveable feasts, connected to other ongoing questions and definitions, such as the nature of the humanity of Grendel, his mother and Beowulf, or the legitimacy of Beowulf's presence in this space. The spatialization of the hall opens into further multiple dimensions of meaning, which in turn are implicated in the constitution of place. To anticipate section three, embodiment and space are clearly imbricated. Fabienne Michelet argues that 'the text's different places ultimately all reflect one another and blur the division between the human and the inhuman, between "us" and "them"'.[30]

From the built space of the hall, to conceptions of landscape, to physical geography, *Beowulf* meets one radical challenge of contemporary cultural geography, that of creating space as a 'simultaneity of multiple trajectories', and new critical attention has been paid within the field to the difference of its conceptions of space and place.[31] Within the poem, the questions raised by even a cursory look at the mere and its landscape – where it is, how it is placed and imagined in relation to Heorot, what kinds of lines of demarcation define it, and who can cross them – suggest a variety of spatial possibilities *becoming*, but not resolving into singular, specified place. Without the poem, the scholarly quest to locate it geographically, to define just where its actions take place, and exactly where which tribe comes from, produces, much like the search for a specific date, a host of questions that once more bring us closer to the mode of the poem than their answers.[32] Another well-known and much studied passage makes this point. Beowulf's first voyage to Denmark (210–28) invites questions about where the Geats come from if we take the poet at his word and it does in fact take Beowulf and his men two days to get to Heorot – they arrive 'on the next day' ('ōþres dōgores', 219). What, then, is the poet's understanding of the physical geography of these Scandinavian seafaring tribes, and how is this spatial savvy, or lack thereof, connected to other modes of scholarly classification of the poem? Is the passage a possible verbal sea-chart containing useful navigational information, a derivative echo of

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30 Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest*, p. 113.
31 Massey, *For Space*, p. 61. See also Overing and Osborn, *Landscape of Desire*; Lees and Overing (eds.), *A Place to Believe In*; and N. Howe, *Writing the Map*.
32 See Leake, *Geats of Beowulf*; Niles, 'Myth and History', provides a summary of critical identifications of the Geats. See Niles *et al.*, *Beowulf and Lejre*, for a multidisciplinary discussion of the location of Heorot at Lejre.

classical sources, or a repetition or variation of similar scenes in other Old English poems?[33] Whether it is utterly formulaic, actual geographical description, or anything in between, allowing this passage to keep possible meanings in play, or in tension, also allows the geography of the poem to inhabit various spaces, to create space as a 'simultaneity of multiple trajectories'. Now, this is *not* to imply that the *Beowulf* poet never quite knows what is where. It is, rather, to emphasize that the where of the poem, like the when, is a dynamic process; that space and time intersect in an ongoing continuum, that the poem is always on the move; and that it has the peculiar and profound capacity to *let this be*, to allow the continuum, to resist hard assembly.

Bodies and things in space and time

> Any individual experience of gender is rooted in personal history, collective histories, and the slowly but also rapidly evolving, historically shifting world of bodies, words, and material life.
>
> Adrienne Harris, *Gender as Soft Assembly*, p. 175

Things, like swords and halls, move within *Beowulf*'s continuum of time and space. As we have seen, halls and swords are kinetic concepts: Heorot is a space made and unmade on a variety of levels, material and conceptual; Wiglaf's sword is an object brandished through time, the distinct object and the single warrior's gesture forming a visual prism connecting multiple trajectories in other spaces and times. Objects like swords, however, and indeed the entire warrior apparatus that comprises armour, are also integrally connected to bodies, and to the process of masculine embodiment in particular. This section considers one of the most radical aspects of the poem, for it argues that identity and embodiment are also part of the poem's space-time continuum. These concepts are shifting, fluid and indeterminate, and such indeterminacy has an ethical dimension which offers creative if discomfiting possibilities for imagining bodies and identities. As the poem demands of its audience a relocation within its time and space, it also resituates the self. Are we willing to relocate?

Embodiment is no single or simple matter, as the linguistic collocation of bodies and objects persistently suggests. This process is much more readily identified as the literary device of *personification*, something students of Old English recognize as a characteristic habit of Old English poets. It is, however,

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33 See George Clark, 'Traveler Recognizes His Goal'; and Andersson, *Early Epic Scenery*, pp. 146–52. For alternative ways of mapping the poem, see Overing and Osborn, *Landscape of Desire*, pp. 1–37.

an aspect of traditional poetic diction that is well worth attempting to rethink and to defamiliarize. Personification conjures, but also conflates, the questions raised by trying to define the difference between a metonym and a metaphor – does the object possess the 'human' characteristic or does it stand in for it, as contiguous substitute, *pars pro toto*? Is it *is* or *as*? Identifiable with or comparable to? What, or whom, does Wiglaf's sword 'stand for'? The slippage of categories suggests that it might be more productive to think about personification as a process of becoming, of determining parameters, as a linguistic negotiation of the category of personhood. The poem contains numerous examples of personification where objects, bodies and body parts cross-refer, but this section will focus on those objects connected to male personification. If the sword and warrior comprise a referential continuum, the entire apparatus of armour also provides a linguistic mechanism for tracing the lineaments of masculine embodiment. The male warrior body can be seen to be assembled, disassembled, concealed, revealed in the poetic collocation of bodies, body parts and armour.[34] Beowulf's gearing up before the fight with Grendel's mother, for example, literally and figuratively demarcates the warrior, and assembles the hero's body before the onlookers:

> Ġyrede hine Bēowulf
> eorlġewǣdum, nalles for ealdre mearn;
> scolde herebyrne hondum ġebrōden,
> sīd ond searofāh, sund cunnian,
> sēo ðe bāncofan beorgan cūþe,
> þæt him hildegrāp hreþre ne mihte,
> eorres inwitfenġ, aldre ġesceþðan;
> ac se hwīta helm hafelan werede,
> sē þe meregrundas menġan scolde,
> sēċan sundġebland sinċe ġeweorðad,
> befongen frēawrāsnum, swā hine fyrndagum
> worhte wǣpna smið, wundrum tēode,
> besette swīnlīcum, þæt hine syðþan nō
> brond ne beadomēċas bītan ne meahton.
> Næs þæt þonne mǣtost mæġenfultuma,
> þæt him on ðearfe lāh ðyle Hrōðgāres;
> wæs þǣm hæftmēċe Hrunting nama;
> þæt wæs ān foran ealdġestrēona;
> ecg wæs īren, ātertānum fāh,
> āhyrded heaþoswāte; nǣfre hit æt hilde ne swāc
> manna ǣngum þāra þe hit mid mundum bewand,

34 See further Overing, '*Beowulf* on Gender'.

sē ðe gryresīðas   ġegān dorste,
folcstede fāra;   næs þæt forma sīð,
þæt hit ellenweorc   æfnan scolde.   (1441–64)

[Then Beowulf showed / no care for his life, put on his armor. / His broad mail-shirt was to explore the mere, / closely hand-linked, woven by craft; / it knew how to keep his bone-house whole, / that the crush of battle not reach his heart, / nor the hateful thrusts of enemies, his life. / His shining helmet protected his head; / soon it would plunge through heaving waters, / stir up the bottom, its magnificent head-band / inset with jewels, as in times long past / a master smith worked it with his wondrous skill, / set round its boar plates, that ever afterwards / no sword or war-ax could ever bite through it. / Not the least aid to his strength was the sword / with a long wooden hilt which Hrothgar's spokesman / now lent him in need, Hrunting by name. / It was the best of inherited treasures, / its edge was iron, gleaming with venom-twigs, / hardened in war-blood; never in the fray / had it failed any man who knew how to hold it, / dared undertake the unwelcome journey / to the enemy's homestead. It was not the first time / it had to perform a work of great courage.][35]

But even as Beowulf is actively donning his armour and assuming the identity it collocates, it displays a life and will of its own. Each item is imbued with the capacity to think independently about its function, and even possesses a degree of interiority. The mail-shirt 'knows' how to protect ('beorgan cūþe') the warrior's bone-house, the sword will do its part if the warrior does – it knows how to perform, indeed has its own long history of performance in many other battles; the mail-shirt replicates the warrior's actions – it will 'explore' ('cunnian') the mere, as the helmet will plunge into and stir up its murky depths. Nor are its talent and sentience exceptional: elsewhere in the poem armour can also sing (321–2), and fail (1524), and be held accountable, even shamed when it performs 'as it ought not to' ('swā hyt nō sceolde', 2585). A sword can become the visual analogue for a warrior's resolve or lack thereof (2583–5), or dictate revenge, or both, as the narrative of Wiglaf's sword makes evident.[36] When Wiglaf attempts to rally, or shame, Beowulf's lacklustre troop into action against the dragon, he lists the pieces of armour Beowulf has given in the belief that these men will *become* their armour – in both senses

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35 Chickering, Jr (trans.), *Beowulf*.
36 There is little material distinction between the linguistic form of personification and the actual or realized effect of the piece of armour or other heirloom object. Beowulf reminds Hygelac that even the sight of a sword taken as booty in a previous battle and worn by a rival warrior will be sufficient to incite revenge, to create a reaction in the warrior who remembers the past (2041–56). Objects have presence, whether actively or passively construed; see further Overing, *Language, Sign and Gender*, pp. 33–67.

('þē hē ūsiċ gārwīġend gōde tealde, / hwate helmberend' [2641–2; because he counted us good spear-fighters, brave helm-bearers']), and he concludes his speech with a literal injunction to assemble a shared armoured identity: 'ūrum sceal sweord ond helm, / byrne and beaduscrūd bām ġemǣne' [2659–60; we must bond together, shield and helmet, / mail shirt and sword].[37]

These objects are deeply connected to the emergence of the warrior body and to performative aspects of warrior masculinity. Putting armour on or taking it off, however, are acts of individual male assembly that intersect with other bodies, and objects, in the dynamic space-time continuum of the poem, as armour may shape the collectivity of the troop, be stripped from the dead bodies of other warriors, won, inherited or given away. Its 'life of its own' is, in fact, never that. The continuity of bodies and objects permeates the poem's evocation of memory, space and temporality, perhaps nowhere better exemplified than in the so-called 'Lay of the Last Survivor', another much cited passage (2247–70). As the sole living member of a war-devastated tribe, this warrior has no use for its accumulated treasures. He simply buries them, and dies (2267–70), creating a hiatus in the flow and traffic of male warrior identity that mirrors Beowulf's own childhood memories of his grandfather Hrethel's death, when meaning and purpose are put on hold. When out of circulation, the accoutrements of hall culture cease to carry meaning:

> 'Heald þū nū hrūse,   nū hæleð ne m(ō)stan,
> eorla ǣhte.   Hwæt, hyt ǣr on ðē
> gōde beġēaton;   gūðdēað fornam,
> (f)eorhbeal(o) frēcne,   fȳra ġe(h)wylcne
> lēoda mīnra,   þ(o)n(e) ðe þis [līf] ofġeaf;
> ġesāwon seledrēam(as).   Nāh, hwā sweord weġe
> oððe f(orð bere)   fǣted wǣġe,
> dryncfæt dēore;   dug(uð) ellor s[c]eōc.
> Sceal se hearda helm   (hyr)sted golde,
> fǣtum befeallen;   feormynd swefað,
> þā ðe beadogrīman   bȳwan sceoldon;
> ġe swylċe sēo herepād,   sīo æt hilde ġebād
> ofer borda ġebræc   bite īrena,
> brosnað æfter beorne.   Ne mæġ byrnan hring
> æfter wīġfruman   wīde fēran,
> hæleðum be healfe.   Næs hearpan wyn,
> gomen glēobēames,   ne gōd hafoc
> ġeond sæl swingeð,   ne se swifta mearh

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37 Heaney (trans.), *Beowulf*.

burhstede bēateð.   Bealocwealm hafað
fela feorhcynna   forð onsended.'   (2247–66)

['Keep earth, now that kings may not, / this treasure of ours! From you we
took it / in the beginning – then grievous strife / death in battle, took each
one of my brave / and noble kinsmen who had known such joy / in the
gabled hall. Who now remains / to brandish the sword or burnish the cup /
that we drank from together? They have all gone. / And from the high crown
of the helmet crumble / the plaques of gold; the polishers sleep / who were
wont to brighten that mask of battle. / And the cloak of mail that endured the
clash / of iron swords biting over the shield – / it rusts on the wearer, no
longer a ring-shirt / proud to wander the traveler's ways / by a hero's side.
No more will the harp / sing happy songs, nor will the good hawk / swoop
through the hall, nor the swift stallion / stamp in the doorway. Death has sent
out / many of the living from the land of men!']³⁸

Arms and the man are here deeply interconnected in a process of disassembly
and decay that in turn connects male social function – the various tasks of
upkeep – with aesthetic and literal maintenance of hall culture. The mail-shirt
and the warrior, however, are locked in mutual stasis, and the sounds and
images, the horses and hawks and objects, that create the hall space also cease.
The passage holds bodies and objects within spatialized temporality and the
provisional stasis of loss. Of course, this pile of objects and everything it entails
are dug up, not to say revived, as the dragon becomes its new keeper; it keeps
moving, continuing not a 'life of its own', but on the intersecting trajectory of
bodies and things in space and time. Its next burial place is also that of Beowulf
(3163–5).

The fluid, composite structuring of the masculine body and its ongoing
relation to aspects of linguistic, significatory processes has further ramifica-
tions for how the poem asks us to think about genders and identities. First,
however, a caveat, in that the poem offers a deeply partial glimpse of gender
construction in its emphasis on an elite male warrior class, and to a lesser
extent on high-ranking females.³⁹ Although male bodies are far more evident
in the poem, the lineaments of emergent femininity can be detected by similar
questions about the relation of bodies to things. The connection and interplay
between women and objects, women and objectification, women and/as
'treasure' form a strand of argument that comes into play in a wide range of
studies of the feminine in this poem. Those objects that adorn women, that
accompany them, that they are exchanged for, that they possess, receive and

38 Osborn (trans.), *Beowulf*.
39 See Lees, 'Men and *Beowulf*'.

bestow, figure in much of the recent burgeoning critical attention to women in the poem, whether this is feminist, anthropological, literary, historical or some combination of these and other approaches.[40] Whatever one concludes about the construction and eventual performance of gender, male or female, it is important to remember how the poem resists such closure in its emphasis on emergent, composite and fluid identity.

It is worth noting that in this respect the premodern world of *Beowulf* resonates with contemporary analyses of identity and gender as relational, emergent and multiply coded, as a function of 'soft assembly'. Adrienne Harris argues that by considering 'function and form within specific tasks and specific environments . . . Gender and sex would be inseparable from the interpersonal fields in which they are embedded. At the same time, neither gender identity nor forms of desire are reducible to the interpersonal field. This theory makes a place for excess and indeterminacy. Gender and desire would not be linked in preprogrammed or obvious ways.'[41] Relational psycho-analysis radically challenges the concept of a unitary self; *Beowulf* might be said to take this argument a step further in that it not only offers an emergent context for categories of human or non-human, as well as those of male and female, but also a means of troubling or challenging such categories.

The previous section noted the indeterminacy of the Grendelkin's hall space as consistently more and less recognizable, coming in and out of identifiable focus. So, too, with distinctions of shape and species, let alone gender. Grendel and his mother are famously vague entities, described in both human and animal terms, able to breathe air and live under water. They are rendered somewhat intelligible as mutant products of human, Christian evil, as descendants of Cain (107), but are also unreadable as inheritors of a more shadowy alien race ('fremde þēod', 1691), whose story is recorded on the magical giant-sword in their underwater domain. It is hard to decide whether they are completely one thing, hairy, furry, scaly, damned, human or other-wise.[42] When the unarmoured but ostensibly male body of Grendel encounters that of Beowulf, also resolutely swordless – or partially assembled – in their fight, it is sometimes hard to determine whose body part is whose. Grendel's

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40 See Fulk *et al.* (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, pp. cxxvi–cxxviii; and Orchard, *Critical Companion to Beowulf*, p. 8.
41 A. Harris, *Gender as Soft Assembly*, p. 152.
42 For example, the poet gives Grendel hands ('handa', 746), and two lines later claws ('folme', 748). Grendel's mother has fingers, albeit loathsome ones ('lāþan fingrum', 1505) as well as hateful claws ('atolan clommum', 1502), to cite but a few of the many 'humanized' references in the poem. For a discussion of such terms as they apply to Grendel in particular, see O'Brien O'Keeffe, '*Beowulf*, Lines 702b–836'.

intermittently human body collides with, and is literally wrenched apart by, that of Beowulf, troubling and conflating categories of male, human, and non-human. Though Grendel realizes at first touch that he is outmatched (750), the lengthy description of this fight unfolds as an anxious challenge to terms of embodiment and its spatial dimension, also creating a deep tension over who, or what, will control the hall space. Designated as equally fierce dual 'hall-guardians' ('rēþe renweardas', 770), Beowulf and Grendel all but destroy Heorot in the violence of their encounter (776–82). One last collision, one final embrace of the two bodies, signals the beginning of the end for Grendel, and Beowulf's victory, enabling the temporarily distinct male, human body to fully emerge, and prevail. But the poem offers these moments to us simultaneously, and so gathers time, too, into the process of embodiment:

> Hēold hine fæste,
> sē þe manna wæs   mæġene strenġest
> on þǣm dæġe   þysses līfes.   (788–90)

[He held him fast, / he who was the strongest of men / on that day of this life.]

Here, then, is Beowulf's 'now', synchronized with the reader's, and the poet's, by a refrain that insists on both pastness – 'that was then' – as well as a shared awareness of present temporality.

One further terrible embrace deepens these complexities. Beowulf's encounter with Grendel's mother involves the dissolution or criss-crossing of all kinds of boundaries, between physical milieux of land and water, and between bodies – male, female, human and otherwise. This fight is well known as a serious challenge to the hero, and all that he might represent, but I suggest that in addition to the fate of the Danes or the hero's reputation, something far more disturbing is being negotiated. The central image of the intertwined bodies of hero and 'monster' mother as they meet for the first time (1501–12) is one of a doubled, layered entity, suspended in its watery element, and eliciting a variety of possible gender arrangements, expectations and fears. Beowulf's body, armour-assembled, appears to be protected from pollution, penetration or disintegration, but is entirely vulnerable to the force of another body whose desire fails to materialize. These bodies are separate, yes, but how? The question with such power to disturb is who, or what, are these bodies in that suspended space? This temporary collapsing of hetero-sexual and homosexual desire in terms of gendered identity, and indeed of the boundaries between bodies human or otherwise, does not allow a single

reading of any form of desire, or resolved identity. And such resolution as might be afforded by the hero's eventual victory and literal sundering of both mother's and son's bodies is offset by the power of their blood to melt his sword-blade, to disassemble his armour. The remaining sword-hilt is embedded in the ensuing narrative, a text for Hrothgar's so-called 'sermon' (1700–84) and an insistent evocation of bodies – of all kinds – and their connection to things.

A poem in our time

> She would not say of anyone in the world now that they were this or were that . . . she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day . . . she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that.
>
> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, pp. 8–9

To enter the world of *Beowulf* is to experience change at a visceral level, whether such change is temporal, spatial or embodied; it is to enter that 'slowly but also rapidly evolving, historically shifting world of bodies, words, and material life' that comprises one contemporary site for the forging and emergence of a relational self.[43] While in some aspects these movements of change are necessarily disorienting to a modern reader, the fractured, composite and dynamic mode of the poem resonates with much that is contemporary, not just from certain psychological or psychoanalytical viewpoints but also with regard to postmodern literary critical modes of reading which emphasize the endless 'play' of meaning.[44] This is not to argue that the world of *Beowulf* can be conveniently transposed into a modern, or postmodern, idiom. It is a very old poem, of its own times and places, with its own shifting continuum of bodies, words and things. What it offers to a modern audience is not only an entry into that world, but a recognition of the radical, ethical dimensions of accepting emergence and multivalence. Again, this is not to argue that *Beowulf* gives any clear or moral directives about tolerance of the other. It is a poem largely about violence and fear, punctuated by moments of celebration where violence is controlled and fear is overcome. It regularly interrupts the various processes of becoming with resolution as violence, as death. But it is a poem about violence that continually wrestles with its subject, where celebration is always imbricated with fear, sorrow, foreboding; no moment is discrete. Creative tension and lack of resolution are

43 A. Harris, *Gender as Soft Assembly*, p. 175.
44 See Derrida, 'Structure, Sign, and Play', pp. 247–72.

endemic to the mode of its language, design and vision. One moment, place or thing is invested in another, and carries multiple meaning. In such a world it becomes both dishonest and simply *inappropriate* to solely praise, condemn or conclude. So to the student who asks why one thing in the poem seems to mean two, or three, or more things, or why one question opens up only further questions, the answer might be: get used to it – if you are able – and continue to wrestle with ambiguity. This is the mode of the poem, this is what it *does*. This is what it can do to and for our 'now'.

Chapter 13

Old English lyrics: a poetics of experience

KATHLEEN DAVIS

Without question, the most controversial yet persistent effort to assign a generic label to Old English poems has been the identification of 'elegies' associated with lament and longing for a lost past.[1] Despite common knowledge that this designation grew out of nineteenth-century nationalism as part of an 'often idealized and romanticized picture of pre-Christian German life',[2] and despite repeated admission that the label is technically and historically inappropriate for the Old English poems in question, this generic distinction has steadily grown rigid in critical and editorial practice.[3] In part, critics have sidestepped the inherent problems of this label by expanding from 'elegy' as a poetic term to the idea of an 'elegiac mood', defined long ago as 'the sense of the vanity of life, the melancholy regret for departed glories', and this idea has gradually extended to a general association with lament and nostalgia.[4] The odd result is that the more doubtful the Old English genre became, the more flexible and disparate its definitions, so that – despite nearly a century of study and much evidence to the contrary – the nine poems named as elegies by Ernst Sieper in 1915 are still considered to determine the field: *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Ruin*, *The Wife's Lament*, *Deor*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Husband's Message*, *Resignation* and

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2 Green (ed.), *Old English Elegies*, p. 15. See also the overview and critique by Mora, 'Invention of Old English Elegy'; and Bloomfield, 'Elegy and the Elegiac Mode'.
3 Hence anthologies and editions with titles such as Martin Green's *Old English Elegies*, Roy F. Leslie's *Three Old English Elegies* and Anne Klinck's *Old English Elegies*. Both Green and Klinck provide overviews of the debate: see Green's Introduction, and Klinck, pp. 6, 223–5, and her 'Old English Elegies as a Genre'. Orchard reasserts this generic grouping in 'Not What It Was'.
4 Ker, *Medieval English Literature*, p. 51, quoted by Timmer in his often-cited 'Elegiac Mood in Old English Poetry', p. 33. Timmer argues that only *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* are true elegies, but that the 'elegiac mood', which he defines broadly, is often expressed in Old English epic, especially *Beowulf* (p. 41).

The Riming Poem.[5] All of these poems appear in the famous Exeter Book, the first anthology of poetry in English, and together with *Beowulf* (which is often said to contain elegies and/or to be elegiac) they include the most studied Old English texts.[6]

It is no surprise, then, that the 'elegiac mood' attributed to these poems is commonly said to characterize Old English poetry more generally, even if the terms 'elegy' or 'elegiac mood' are not used. Indeed, Old English literature is routinely characterized as backward-looking, nostalgic, gloomy and pre-occupied with loss, suffering and contempt for the world. The effects of this dominant characterization are rarely addressed: it orients Old English litera-ture to an imagined Germanic past, and it encourages a series of false binaries – such as Germanic/Christian, oral/literate – which likewise follow the patterns of early nationalist and ethnic desire for isolable Germanic origins. Recent work based upon current theories of nostalgia tends to nuance these binaries, but redoubles the insistence upon a fixed backward gaze, suggesting that the poetry offers 'nostalgia for a past that is unbroken, inhabitable, articulate and contiguous', or that Old English literature is 'haunted by the spectre of a heroic past that is always absent, a tradition that has been created by the poets and that is continually mourned by the poetry'.[7] Desire for such a past is more characteristic of the criticism than the poetry, however, and ultimately the constitution of a backward-facing Anglo-Saxon England has facilitated the periodization of English literary history at the year 1066, as well as the isolation of 'pre-Conquest England' from accounts of historical change.[8] To suggest that Anglo-Saxon literature is 'tinged with longing and regret', and implies 'a connection to an unknowably ancient past, lost to memory, but

5 Sieper, *Altenglische Elegie*, cited in Mora, 'Invention of Old English Elegy', p. 130. Green (ed.), *Old English Elegies*, considers eight of these poems (excluding *The Riming Poem*), and Klinck (ed.), *Old English Elegies*, covers these nine, as do Greenfield's 'Old English Elegies' and Conner's 'Old English Elegy'. In *Sources and Analogues*, Calder and Allen provide a section for 'The Elegies' listed as these nine, even though they are clearly sceptical of the category. In 'Not What It Was' Orchard lists these nine as 'elegies identified' (pp. 104–8).

6 Of the many discussions of elegy and *Beowulf*, see, e.g., Fell, 'Perceptions of Transience', pp. 181–3; Greenfield, 'Old English Elegies', p. 142; Green (ed.), *Old English Elegies*, p. 15; and Orchard, 'Not What It Was', pp. 108–9.

7 Liuzza, 'Tower of Babel', p. 14; Trilling, *Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, p. 6. Much recent work on nostalgia is motivated by Boym's *Future of Nostalgia*. Descriptions of the past in Old English poems are sometimes future-oriented in Boym's sense. However, I find the term nostalgia inappropriate for Old English poetry, both because it entails a focus upon mourning that distorts the poetry, and because it inevitably collapses into the stereotypes I discuss above.

8 On the positioning of Anglo-Saxon England as 'before history' and outside the history of medieval Europe as it pertains to 'modernity', see Lees and Overing, 'Before History, Before Difference'.

enshrined in song',[9] is to extend the legacy of what Linda Georgianna aptly identifies as 'the ideology of a transhistorical "Englishness" traceable to the Anglo-Saxon past and dependent upon an almost mystical link between ethnicity, language, and nationality'.[10] It is not a coincidence that the literature of a 'period' constituted to such ends continues to be described as suffused with 'elegiac sensibility' and 'wistful contemplation of past glories lost' – despite our knowledge that Anglo-Saxon authors were literary experimenters and innovators who, working in several languages, engaged and influenced the dynamic of Christian literary, historiographical and exegetical thought.[11]

The parameters of this literary history can nonetheless point the way to rethinking the temporality of these poems as well as their relationship to other Old English literature. Critics who acknowledge the problems of 'elegy' as a category and yet wish to keep it tend to compensate by defining the genre in extremely general terms, suggesting, for example, that 'the central preoccupation of the elegies as a group [is] the problem of man in his time', or that in the Old English context 'elegy' refers to 'a broader notion encompassing both reflective and lyrical elements'.[12] Critics of all persuasions have noted the strong affinities of these poems to other Old English literary 'genres', especially the riddles, wisdom poetry (such as *Maxims*, *Fates of Men*) and homilies, as well as to specific poems not counted in the group, such as *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Order of the World* and the poetic signatures of Cynewulf. Cutting across this critical discourse, then, is a persistent attention to the poetry's concern with temporality, to the qualities of its personal, or 'lyric' voice, and to the tensions between this personal voice and enigmatic, gnomic and didactic elements. Also well recognized is the poetry's self-conscious references to poetic composition and to the conditions of its own writing. Taken together, these attributes provide a useful starting point for approaching these and related poems, which are not backward-looking, world-rejecting or nostalgic in any sense. Indeed, many of these poems undertake a study of just such an attitude, and, with a finely calibrated sense of multiple temporalities, place it in quotation marks.

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9 Orchard, 'Not What It Was', p. 101.
10 Georgianna, 'Coming to Terms', p. 43. Generation of an ancient, heroic past was also part of the larger fabric of Orientalism: see Frantzen, *Desire for Origins*; and, generally, Said, *Orientalism*. Claims for an ancient Germanic heritage nonetheless continue, or revive. See, for example, J. Harris, 'Nativist Approach to *Beowulf*'. For an excellent demonstration that the idea of 'Germanic legend' is 'ours, not theirs', see Frank, 'Germanic Legend'.
11 Quotations from Orchard, 'Not What It Was', pp. 101, 102.
12 Green (ed.), *Old English Elegies*, p. 23; Klinck, 'Old English Elegies as a Genre', p. 129.

The poems I consider here study the nature of time and contemplate basic temporal questions about narrative strategy and poetic composition: What are the necessary conditions for beginning a narrative (whether personal or collective)? How can one situate a speaking voice in a moving field (that is, in transient time)? What is the significance of representing the past (especially with respect to the future)? Anglo-Saxon poets grappled with these questions in theological and philosophical terms, and some of their answers – or more precisely the limits to the possibility of answering – are plotted in the structure and the lexical interplay of these poems, which I will call 'lyrics' in the capacious sense of that term.[13] The issue of transience is central to these poems, but that is not to say that they therefore reject worldly experience or that they long nostalgically for a lost past. To the contrary, these lyrics offer their representations of worldly experience as essential matter for the meditation necessary to the composition of a steadfast mind capable of discerning and resisting evil, and thus of achieving salvation. The hoarding and representation of such experience offers a means of countering transience, acquiring wisdom, and coming to terms with the coursing of time and events.

Transience and experience

The Wanderer often stands as emblematic of Old English 'elegy'. The speaker's statements that he is an exile who has lost his lord and the joys of the mead hall, his reflection upon material prosperity in the form of an *ubi sunt* catalogue, and his culminating exhortation to seek reward in heaven, have suggested a pattern of lament and consolation that has been mapped upon other lyrics. Together with *The Seafarer* and *The Ruin*, *The Wanderer* has long been an often-anthologized favourite, much beloved for its evocative poignancy. The unusual *Riming Poem*, by contrast, with its difficult, innovative vocabulary and form, has garnered little attention and is rarely anthologized. Yet within the Exeter Book it stands on equal footing with the more popular poems, and according to most criticism it generalizes a conventional 'elegiac' theme. Because it seems topically generic, narrates the full course of a life, and takes poetic language as one of its own topics, *The Riming Poem* offers an unusually rich resource for approaching temporality in Old English lyric.

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13 See 'Lyric' in Preminger and Brogan (eds.), *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*.

Like *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem* employs a first-person narrator who tells of joys and sorrows and concludes with a homiletic exhortation. It differs, however, in its less personal voice and, as its editorial title indicates, its extravagant rhyme. Pushing language to the limit, *The Riming Poem* combines a complex scheme of internal and end-line rhyme, a demanding pattern of alliteration, and, as James Earl phrases it, 'playfully erudite obscurantism'.[14] Once considered inscrutable nonsense, this poem is now appreciated for the complexity of its technique, understood in the context of Latin hymnody, Celtic and Norse verse and Anglo-Latin poetry, each of which also employs exuberant rhyme and/or wordplay.[15] What emerges from debates about sources and influences is that, considered within its multilingual literary context, *The Riming Poem* is not at all bizarre; it only seems so when judged from the perspective of Old English verse interpreted as rigidly traditional. Its very existence in the Exeter Book speaks to the literary milieu of some Anglo-Saxon poets and their ambitions for the vernacular.

The compass of *The Riming Poem* is the compass of a life. Its first thirty-two-line section, in past tense, paints the speaker's aristocratic youth as a profusion of wealth and joyful but unreflective activity, brimming with high praise, prancing horses, swift ships and well-composed song. This first section then pivots with a more reflective ten-line section evaluating this proud, youthful state of mind bolstered by success and friends. The second half shifts suddenly with 'Nu' [Now] to the present tense and to the aging speaker's altered state of mind: he is distressed, joys have fled, bitterness sets in and death approaches. Like the first section, this one builds towards an emphasis upon poetic composition that, as we will see, is also the writing and culmination of the speaker's life. The final ten lines shift again to reflection, reassessing the speaker's dejection and closing with a homiletic confirmation of hope and glory. In format *The Riming Poem* is riddle-like. Its opening with 'Me', its ambiguous language, and its juxtaposition of two states of existence are very similar, for example, to Riddle 26, in which the speaker recounts that it was deprived of life, its skin converted to vellum and its pages transformed into a precious book. Shifting at the halfway point to the present tense with 'Nu', the riddle then speaks as a Gospel book and explains its salvific virtues. In both poems bodily transformation results in qualitative change relating to

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14 Earl, 'Hisperic Style', p. 189.
15 See Lehmann, 'Old English "Riming Poem"', pp. 437–41; 'Introduction' to Macrae-Gibson (ed.), *Riming Poem*; Earl, 'Hisperic Style', pp. 187–91; Klinck (ed.), *Old English Elegies*, pp. 40–1. Lehmann, Macrae-Gibson and Earl offer translations; Earl gives the fullest account of the poem's artful irregularities.

salvation – in *The Riming Poem* a change in state of mind, in the riddle a change in spiritual value – and in both it is reflection upon the materiality of writing that creates an 'I' sustainable across multiple states of being, and across time. This attention to writing and to the generation of the poem's own voice is one means of validating and supporting the shift, as I explain below, from personal narrative to communal lesson.

From the start *The Riming Poem* calls attention to issues of language and narrative, both by disrupting lexical and grammatical expectations, and by addressing the temporal problem of narrative beginning. Its opening lines intertwine the creation of the universe with the birth of the speaker:

> Me lifes onlah   se þis leoht onwrah
> ond þæt torhte geteoh,   tillice onwrah.   (1–2)

Here are two translations:

> [My life He lent who light insent,
> Founded the firmament with fair intent.]
>
> [To me he offered life who showed forth the light,
> showed it forth in excellence and shaped its brilliance.][16]

These translations diverge because they take different approaches to the play of 'geteoh', which could be either a noun meaning 'matter, material' or a verb from *geteon* [to draw forth, produce].[17] Thus 'geteoh' references the impossibility of pure beginning by capturing stasis and movement in a single word. This tension between substantive form and verbal action mimics the temporal paradox (or mystery) of God's generative word: God is atemporal and unchanging, yet with Creation initiates time and change. Beginning requires difference and movement, hence transience.[18] The relation of beginning and transience is underscored in *The Riming Poem*'s first line with 'onlah' [lent], which is cognate with *læne* [on loan], the most common word in Old English for fleeting time and the temporariness of worldly things.[19] The opening 'Me

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16 Quotations of the Old English are from Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*, by line number. Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own. Translations above are by Earl, 'Hisperic Style', p. 188, and Macrae-Gibson (ed.), *Riming Poem*, p. 31. Translations of *The Riming Poem* vary widely, in part because of its ambiguities, and in part because it is often suspected of textual corruption and thus frequently, but differently, emended.

17 For discussion of 'geteoh', see Macrae-Gibson (ed.), *Riming Poem*, p. 38; and Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*, vol. II, pp. 570–1.

18 The *Advent Lyrics*, which open the Exeter Book, similarly focus upon the mystery of beginning, exemplified by the problem of Christ's being co-eternal with, yet born of, God the father, something 'no man under the sky' can explain. See especially *Advent Lyrics*, in Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*, vol. I, pp. 214–23.

19 See Fell, 'Perceptions of Transience' for extensive discussion of *læne*.

lifes onlah' [To me he loaned life] thus recognizes mortality – the end is already in the beginning – but rather than mourning, the poem ultimately celebrates the space of life.

The moment of birth/creation in the first line of *The Riming Poem* arcs across its narrative, and connects through the use of an envelope pattern to the speaker's impending death in line 70, the only other line in the poem to begin with 'Me'. Here, the speaker turns to the digging of his grave:

> Me þæt wyrd gewæf,   ond gehwyrft forgeaf,
> þæt ic grofe græf,   ond þæt grimme græf
> flean flæsc ne mæg.   (70–2a)

> [For me *wyrd* wove this, and granted this course
> that I en-grave a grave and that grim grave (or stylus)
> flesh cannot flee.][20]

This passage explicitly connects the writing of the poem to the life and body of the speaker, but inverts their temporal trajectories. The grave-digging is a scene of engraving or writing – simultaneously the etching away of the human body and the writing of the poem. Editors usually emend the second 'græf' in line 71 to 'scræf' [cave] to avoid repetition. But the poet frequently repeats words, and in fact does so in the poem's opening two lines (each ending in 'onwrah'), to which these lines allude. This emendation, moreover, cuts short the sustained onomatopoeia of alliterating *gr* words as they grate deeper and deeper, and it eliminates part of the play on *grafan* [to dig/engrave] and *græf* [grave/stylus].[21] The image of a stylus carving out a grave as it carves into flesh (the flesh both of the page and of the speaker, whose life becomes the poem) well suits the lines to follow, which describe a worm eating, battling, piercing the dead body: 'oþ þæt beoþ þa ban an' [77; until there is bone, alone'].[22] The end of the carving is the ending of the life story, which,

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20 For reasons explained below, I leave 'wyrd' untranslated.
21 For words from A to G, see *DOE*; from H to Y, see Bosworth-Toller. For the many references throughout *The Riming Poem* to writing and books, see Earl, 'Hisperic Style', pp. 192–3.
22 The half-line 'an' is usually considered defective, and hypothetical text supplied. However, I agree with Macrae-Gibson that 'this representation of the final reduced state of man, beyond even the devouring worms, by a half-line reduced almost to nothing, if indeed a scribal error, must be one of the happiest in the history of poetry' (*Riming Poem*, p. 54). I therefore omit Muir's supplied 'gebrosnad on'. Focus on the body as food for worms connects this poem with the 'Soul and Body' poems, although it differs from them in tone and in the unity of material and spiritual (body and spirit) in this poem's 'me'.

paradoxically, is now profuse and full on the flesh of the page, as open to the bookworm as to the hungry eye.[23]

This written life – or more precisely the gathered and figured experience of a life – provides the foundation for contemplating mortality as well as its relationship to fame. Only when the life is complete, literally taken to the point of *decomposition* until it has reached a point of singularity with 'an' [alone], does the poem take a broader perspective on the moment of death and the *composition* of 'fame':

> ond æt nyhstan nan   nefne se neda tan
> balawun her gehloten.   Ne biþ hlisa adroren.   (78–9)

> [and at the last, unless the necessary be evil
> nothing ruinous has happened here; nor is fame perished.][24]

Unless the necessity of death is itself an evil (and the implication is that it is not), the body dies but fame stands fast; in fact, death opens the very possibility of fame and of the poetry that celebrates it – as we will also see in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*.

At this point, too, *The Riming Poem* shifts to the plural with 'Uton' [Let us] for a closing exhortation resembling those of the Old English homilies. The relation between lyric and homily turns on exemplarity, the notion that a singular experience can offer a general lesson, one that can be assimilated by others and endure over time. The singular becomes generalized through 'fame', which marks, as Roy Liuzza observes, 'the relationship between culture and time'.[25] Saints and heroes are the most obvious exemplary figures, but Old English lyrics suggest that exemplarity is more widely achievable, particularly as, or through, poetry. The lyrical epilogues and runic signatures of the poet 'Cynewulf', for example, link the exemplary lives of saints to riddlic versions of the poet's own name.[26] In each case, Cynewulf comments upon his writing process, his didactic purpose, and his hope for salvation. Likewise, *The Riming Poem* and many other lyrics address poetry's role in negotiating the difference between singular experience and general lesson through their explicit reflections upon poetic composition and/or writing, the means of representation by which the singular is made accessible to thought.

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23 Exeter Book Riddle 47 refers with irony to a bookworm's ability to ingest a holy book, yet receive no benefit from it.
24 I have rejected Muir's emendation of the manuscript's 'her' to 'þær'.
25 Liuzza, '*Beowulf*: Monuments, Memory, History', p. 95. Liuzza is here speaking of *dom* [fame] in the poetry.
26 'Cynewulf' is so called for the runic signatures woven into the epilogues of four poems: *Fates of the Apostles*, *Elene*, *Christ II* and *Juliana*.

Ultimately, in *The Riming Poem* worldly experience is not rejected: it becomes a poem that testifies to 'hlisa' [fame, glory], and is the basis of thinking one's own existence in time and in the face of death. 'Her', the poems insists, 'sindon miltsa blisse' [82b; Here are the joys of mercy] – that is, *here* in contemplating the experience of a life, and *here* in this poem.[27] Far from looking backward and confirming lament, the poem offers its own writing as the reverse of a life to death process, as testimony to the potential honour of a life and thus the possibility of salvation. Most editors emend the poem's 'her' in line 82 to 'þær', assuming that in a Christian exhortation joys can only be heavenly. But in *The Riming Poem* and even more explicitly in *The Wanderer*, meditation upon worldly experience is precisely what allows for the steadfastness of mind necessary to attain salvation.

The experience contemplated in *The Riming Poem* must be considered as 'experience' in the strong sense of the word as it relates to 'experiment' – it does not confirm or replicate past forms, but cuts its own passage, as a trial or an event. Experience in this sense is directly related to the issue of earthly transience, a fundamental concern of Old English poetry, and it is thus worth considering in some detail. Experience as I am discussing it here *happens* in 'real time', so to speak; it is by definition impossible to predict, fully prepare for, or control. If we were to have full control over a situation, nothing could actually *happen*: we would simply repeat past determinations. By definition, then, experience is constituted precisely by what exceeds control, intention, and prognostication. For this reason, too, experience cannot be repeated – it can only ever be *happening*. The sense that the singularity of a particular human life is directly tied to such experience, necessarily transient and never fully controlled or replicated, is what connects the poetry's focus upon transience to its concern with *wyrd*, which is usually translated as 'fate' even though the sense of predetermination often associated with 'fate' is not suitable for *wyrd*. As B. J. Timmer observed long ago, *wyrd* usually glosses not Latin *fatum* but *fortuna* 'to express "that which happens to us in our life," the events of our lot, life'.[28] I will discuss *wyrd*

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27 Note the similarity to the opening 'Her' of Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entries, which is likewise spatio-temporal.

28 Timmer, 'Wyrd in Anglo-Saxon Prose and Poetry', p. 129. He is here discussing Alfred's translation of Boethius, but his general argument and examples sustain the sense of *wyrd* as 'event, lot, that which happens'. While I do not agree with all of Timmer's conclusions, his survey is thorough and useful. In their edition of *The Wanderer*, Dunning and Bliss observe that 'Latin *fatum* is the neuter past participle of *fari* "speak"; *wyrd* is related to the stem of *weorðan* "become". Whereas "Fate" is "what has been spoken" (by some superior power), *wyrd* is by etymology merely "what comes to pass"' (pp. 71–2).

further below with respect to individual poems, but for now will simply note that *wyrd* is never reducible to mere chance or accident any more than it is to predetermination. Nor is *wyrd* meaningless; rather, it is irresolvable to structures that generate meaning. It identifies what is specific to a particular life, a singular path of experience, and ultimately the specificity of that life's ending in death.

Poems such as *The Riming Poem* and *The Wanderer* ponder the nature of transience and *wyrd* together with their relationship to the inevitability of death, but this is not to say that they either lament the world's passing or reject the world in *contemptus mundi* fashion. To the contrary, these poems elaborate a temporality that resists, or works to suspend the movement of, transient time by gathering the experience of a life, like a hoard, and taking it as the substance of meditation. Never *immediately* graspable or presentable, experience can only be figured in language retrospectively, and its expression in language provides the substance for meditation even as it comprises the poem. Mnemonic but not nostalgic, such meditation offers a means for grasping time in its transitoriness, for thinking the disappearance of one's own experience as it happens, and for registering it in a way that yields wisdom. As we will see, *The Wanderer* quite explicitly discusses this temporal relation; *The Riming Poem*, on the other hand, *performs* it. Its constant rhyme and quick, regular metre speed the poem forward, yet this movement is resisted by the poem's arresting wordplay and contorted syntax, generating tension between the rushing movement of transient time and the suspense of that movement. *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, discussed further below, likewise perform experience – with *Wulf and Eadwacer*, for instance, emphasizing separation with a series of isolated half-lines. Similarly, *The Riming Poem*'s language does not simply narrate but rhythmically and onomatopoeically performs moods and motions – whether the joyful prancing of horses, the swift skimming of a ship, or the solemn digging of a grave. The poem thus enacts the very life experience about which it tells, even as it emerges as poetic experience for its readers.

Hoarding and meditation

The opening of *The Wanderer* raises all the issues of experience, singularity, *wyrd* and temporality that I have discussed thus far, and that are also important to poems such as *The Seafarer*, *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Ruin*. I therefore consider it in some detail:

> Oft him anhaga   are gebideð,
> metudes miltse,   þeah þe he modcearig
> geond lagulade   longe sceolde
> hreran mid hondum   hrimcealde sæ,
> wadan wræclastas   – wyrd bið ful ared.   (1–5)

[Often the singular man experiences favour,
the mercy of the lord, even though anxious in spirit he
must for a long while across the water-ways
stir with his hands the ice-cold sea,
traverse paths of exile; *wyrd* is greatly *ared*.]

As often noted, the verb *gebidan* (line 1) ranges in sense from 'remain, stay, dwell; wait, await' to 'expect; experience, endure', and thus seems to raise difficulties for interpretation with regard to temporality.[29] Does the 'anhaga' wait for, or expect, 'are' (honour, favour, mercy, property)? Or does he already dwell in/experience 'are'?[30] I suggest that if we consider *gebidan* in terms of 'experience' as I discuss it above, its various senses are not at odds here. To dwell or remain, as in modern English 'abide', is never a condition of stasis; it is always open to contingencies, to emerging conditions, to experience as it happens. Thus 'to abide' is also to 'bide one's time', to wait, to remain expectant. The point is not that there are only contingencies, that there is no stability or control, but rather that dwelling in honour, favour or mercy is never static: it must necessarily be a condition of expectation, open to the future. The verb *gebidan* indicates precisely this open temporality of experience, abiding in expectation.

It is possible, of course, to guard against contingency, to maximize safety by living cautiously like the *The Seafarer*'s land-dweller, 'bealosiþa hwon, / wlonc ond wingal' [28b–9a; with few grievous journeys, proud and wine-flushed], in a state of unreflective ignorance similar to that described in the first half of *The Riming Poem*. The land-dweller thus does not know 'hwæt þa sume dreogað / þe þa wræclastas   widost lecgað' [56b–7; what those perform (or endure), those who furthest traverse the paths of exile]. Those *most* exposed to and reflective upon experience, like the speaker of *The Wanderer*, or those who

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29 On *gebidan*, in addition to *DOE*, see Dunning and Bliss (eds.), *Wanderer*, pp. 41–2; and Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*, vol. II, p. 503, and citations therein.
30 Whether 'are' refers to 'Christian' grace or mercy, or to the favour of a 'secular' lord, has been a matter of debate. The debate itself makes little sense, since it has long been obvious that the interchange of vocabulary referring to God's power and that of aristocratic lordship sustains and legitimizes both. For discussion, see Orchard, 'Re-reading *The Wanderer*'.

deliberately risk such exposure, like the speaker of *The Seafarer*, best exemplify the connection between experience and the singularity of a life. Thus it is an 'anhaga' who is the subject of experience in *The Wanderer*. Usually translated as 'solitary being', the poetic word 'anhaga' references figures who are exceptional, singular in thought and resolve – Andreas as he proves invulnerable to the demons' attack, the Phoenix as it flies off from the crowd, Beowulf as he returns alone across the water after the death of Hygelac (in a passage that emphasizes Beowulf's repeated risk-taking and exceptional courage).[31] In contrast to the profuse and noisy world of *The Seafarer*'s land-dweller, the locus of the wise speakers in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* is the empty sea, so that, as Patricia Dailey suggests: 'As an exterior that returns as the most interior of spaces, it marks limits in space and limits within a subject . . . and like the space of the poem, it suspends the time of realities and the space associated with it.'[32] *The Wanderer*'s 'anhaga', like the speakers of *The Seafarer*, *The Wife's Lament*, *Wulf and Eadwacer* and even *Widsith*, lives as an exile maximally exposed to experience, his singularity intensified, shimmering as poetry.

The singularity of the 'anhaga' links to the final clause of this opening passage: 'wyrd bið ful ared'. The form 'ared' (alternative spelling *aræd*) is not securely attested, but it derives in any case from the verb *arædan*, which ranges in sense from 'arrange, settle, determine' to 'interpret, explain, solve'. Based on the first sense, this line is usually rendered 'fate is wholly inexorable' or '(his) fate is fully determined'.[33] But *arædan* is cognate with *ræd* – 'counsel' or 'wisdom' – and its connotation 'to determine' entails coming to a determination by virtue of careful thought and interpretation. According to this sense, the action of 'ared' can be attributed to the 'anhaga', whose singularity and experience enable him to come to a wise determination about *wyrd*. Similarly, the related verb *aredan* has the sense of 'to discover, find' as well as 'to make ready, prepare, compose (one's mind, thoughts)'. Thus in the Old English version of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, Wisdom states: 'Ac ic ondræde þæt ic þe læde hidres þidres on þa paþas of þinum wege, þæt ðu ne mæge eft þinne weg aredian' [But I fear that I would lead you hither and thither onto those paths away from your

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31 For extended discussion of 'anhaga'/'anhoga', see Dunning and Bliss (eds.), *Wanderer*, pp. 37–40.

32 P. Dailey, 'Questions of Dwelling', pp. 191–2.

33 See, e.g., Mitchell and Robinson (eds.), *Guide to Old English*, p. 283; Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*, vol. II, p. 503; and Dunning and Bliss (eds.), *Wanderer*, p. 72. For thorough discussion, see Griffith, '*Wyrd bið ful aræd*'.

way, so that you might not again figure out your way].[34] In the prose preface to *Pastoral Care*, *arædan* is the verb Alfred twice uses to describe the ability to understand written English ('Englisc gewrit arǣden'),[35] and in *Apollonius of Tyre*, *arædan* consistently refers to wise interpretation: Apollonius receives the riddle from Antiochus, contemplates it, and 'mid Godes fultume he þæt soð arædde' [with God's help he interpreted the truth].[36] Although rare in the poetry, *arædan* there consistently refers to understanding and interpretation: Daniel, for instance, could 'bocstafas / arædde and arehte' [decipher and interpret the writing].[37] For the 'anhaga' of *The Wanderer*, 'wyrd bið ful ared' does not confirm an inevitable or predetermined fate, which in any case, as Mark Griffith notes, would suit neither the context within the poem nor Christian doctrine.[38] Rather, I suggest, this clause references the relation between the 'anhaga's exceptional status and his grasp of *wyrd*; by virtue of his experience and wisdom, he has come to terms with *wyrd*, and can decipher what to others may seem mysterious, like a riddle. If Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* is at work in this poem, as often suggested, the 'anhaga' is similar to the wise man who keeps earthly things in perspective and thereby maximizes his free will. For him *wyrd* is 'determined' only in the sense that he has come to a determination regarding the events of life, and the depth of his understanding enables him to become 'snottor on mode' [111a; wise in mind] – a man able to convert experience into wisdom.

The Wanderer insists that such conversion of experience into wisdom is possible only if one gathers the experience of a life, like a hoard, and takes it as the substance of meditation.[39] Here and throughout much Old English poetry, the figure of the hoard corresponds to a repository of thoughts and emotions, comparable to a poetic 'word-hoard', as the speaker of *The Wanderer* emphasizes after he declares his solitude:

34 See Godden and Irvine (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius*, vol. 1, p. 372, lines 82–4.
35 Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, vol. 1, p. 7, lines 13, 17.
36 Goolden (ed.), *Apollonius of Tyre*, IV.19.
37 *Daniel*, lines 739b–40a in Krapp (ed.), *Vercelli Book*. Cf. 'Ne mihton arædan runcræftige men / engles ærendbec' [733–4a; nor could men skilled in mysteries understand the angel's message]. The verb *aredan* is also rare in the poetry, but when used it consistently means 'to discover'.
38 Griffith, 'Wyrd bið ful aræd', pp. 148–9. Griffith suggests the translation 'one's lot is highly ordered', which for him indicates that one's lot is not completely determined. I have followed his finding that 'ful' is an intensifier, rather than an adverb meaning 'fully'. In considering the connotations of *arædan*, Griffith mentions but dismisses, with little explanation, the sense 'to decipher' as found in *Daniel*, line 146.
39 *The Wanderer* has long been understood as addressing the meditative process. See the discussion in Dunning and Bliss (eds.), *Wanderer*, pp. 80–1.

Ic to soþe wat
þæt biþ in eorle   indryhten þeaw
þæt he his ferðlocan   fæste binde,
healde his hordcofan,   hycge swa he wille.
Ne mæg werig mod   wyrde wiðstondan,
ne se hreo hyge helpe   gefremman.
Forðon domgeorne   dreorigne oft
in hyra breostcofan   bindað fæste.   (11b–18)

[I know in truth
that for a noble man it is a virtuous practice
that he bind fast his thought-enclosure,
guard his hoard-coffer, think as he will.
The weary mind cannot withstand *wyrd*,
nor can a disturbed mind offer help.
Therefore those eager for fame often
bind sorrow fast within the breast-chamber.]

The ceaseless churning of *wyrd* can overwhelm the weary or disturbed mind, the mind that simply allows itself to be pushed along with the flow of events, never able to gather itself, to reflect or meditate. Against this possibility, those eager for fame hoard their experiences, which register here as emotions, in the 'ferðlocan', 'hordcofan' or 'breostcofan' – all kennings for the breast as the locus of thought.[40] Malcolm Godden suggests that both *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* distinguish between the mind as an agent of emotion and an 'I' that is the subject or agent of thinking, and that the mind is an 'inner self' that the 'conscious self cannot penetrate' but must hold captive.[41] The mental processes described in the poetry are clearer and less dichotomous than this, however, if we consider them in terms of temporality: the mind experiences thoughts and emotions in transient time, and these thoughts and emotions are not graspable in themselves; remembering (thus representing) and reflecting upon such experience is what constitutes the 'I' who speaks the poem and who understands the need for hoarding and meditation. Such binding or hoarding of experience contrasts with – indeed counteracts – the binding nature of sorrow ('sorg', 39–40), which the speaker treats as a form of turbulence that, like binding waves ('waþema gebind', 57), can overwhelm or oppress an unfortified mind.

40 See Jager, 'Speech and the Chest'. For analysis that considers poetic terms for 'mind' in the context of work by Alcuin, Alfred and Ælfric, see Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind'; see also Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*.
41 Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', p. 292.

Holding silent, then, is not a matter of forced isolation or fearing reprisal, as Nicholas Howe has suggested.[42] Rather, it is a position of strength, as the poem's closing exhorts: 'ne sceal næfre his torn to rycene / beorn of his breostum acyþan, nemþe he ær þa bote cunne' [112b–13; a man must never too quickly declare his grief from within his breast, unless he knows the remedy beforehand]. The word *bot* connotes architectural restoration as well as 'remedy'/'cure', suggesting, like *The Riming Poem*, movement towards a position of restorative wisdom analogous to the secure repository of a hoard – a thought-hoard as well as a word-hoard. The hoard must be unlocked, of course, if there is to be poetry, pedagogy and exemplarity, but these can only be legitimate after long contemplation and attainment of wisdom. Thus in the lyric epilogue to *Elene*, Cynewulf relates that he is old and frail, and that he worked his poetic craft through long nights of study and struggle, until God granted him a glorious gift and 'bancofan onband, breostlocan onwand, / leoðucræft onleac' [1249–50a; unbound my bone-chamber, unfastened my breast-enclosure, unlocked the art of poetry']. Such unlocking of the hoard is both the becoming of the poem and the foundation of curative wisdom.

Two lyrics that are instructive for the way they do not offer themselves in terms of hoarding and do not move from singular experience to general lesson are *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, both dramatic mono-logues in a woman's voice.[43] *The Wife's Lament* narrates a story of forced separation and exile that continues into the present, and as she sits weeping, the poem gives form to her grief. Like the speaker of *The Wanderer* she tells of exile and a sea journey, yet her story remains personal, and the familiar metaphors of binding and enclosure maintain a strong literal sense: she is confined to an 'eorðscræfe' [28, 36; earth-cave], and her misery in harsh surroundings prevents any respite from the longing that grips her. The poem's closing resonates with early sections of *The Wanderer*, which empha-size the binding nature of sorrow:

> A scyle geong mon   wesan geomormod,
> heard heortan geþoht,   swylce habban sceal
> bliþe gebæro,   eac þon breostceare,
> sinsorgna gedreag . . .   (42–5a)

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42 N. Howe, 'Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England', pp. 103–4. His suggestion that the seascape poetically expresses the withheld thoughts, however, is productive.

43 The speakers' gender is indicated by several feminine inflections. See Klinck (ed.), *Old English Elegies*, pp. 47–54.

[Ever must the young man be mournful in mind,
hard-hearted in thought, just as he must have
a cheerful demeanour, as well as an anxious mind
continuous troubles . . .][44]

Yet this poem offers no reflective distance from such grief, and its ending with the word 'abidan' emphasizes the open-ended, potentially overwhelming aspect of experience: 'Wa bið þam þe sceal / of langoþe   leofes abidan' [52b–3; Woeful it is for those who, in longing, must await a loved one].

The enigmatic *Wulf and Eadwacer* likewise remains focused on the pain of separation, reinforced by the repeated half-line 'Ungelice is us' [3, 8; It is different for us] which, without an accompanying b-verse, both states and performs the poem's sense of pain and isolation. The speakers of these two poems refer to their matter as 'giedd' [riddle, song], and their lyrics comprise a sheer outpouring of sorrow and unresolved separation – there is no turn to reflection upon experience, no shift to the plural, and no discussion of their own writing, with the telling exception of *Wulf and Eadwacer*'s concluding suggestion that it is not composed, its parts never joined: 'Þæt mon eaþe tosliteð þætte næfre gesomnad wæs – / uncer giedd geador' [18–19; That may easily be torn apart which was never united – our song together]. These plangent lyrics certainly evoke empathy for the experience they express, but they do not offer themselves as exemplary: they remain singular. Not coincidentally, these are two of the Old English poems that have remained most mysterious to critics.

Composition, imagination, representation

The idea that binding one's thoughts is a prerequisite for meditation and thus a sound mind has a striking parallel in Gregory I's well-known *Regula pastoralis*, translated into English by King Alfred, and this passage helps to clarify just what is at stake in *The Wanderer*. Here, the mind of one who cannot remain silent flows away from itself like water, unable to return. It thus loses itself and becomes vulnerable,

forðæmðe hit [mod] bið todæled on to monigfealda spræca, suelce he self hine selfne ute betyne from ðære smeaunga his agnes ingeðonces, ond sua nacodne hine selfne eowige to wundigeanne his feondum, forðæmðe he ne bið belocen mid nanum gehieldum nanes fæstenes. Swa hit awriten is on

44 These notoriously ambiguous lines have been interpreted both as empathetic description and vengeful curse. See Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, pp. 149–207.

Salomonnes cwidum ðætte se mon se ðe ne mæg his tungan gehealdan sie gelicost openre byrig, ðære ðe mid nane wealle ne bið ymbworht.

[because it [the mind] is divided into too much diverse speaking, as if he had shut himself out from the meditation of his own mind, and so exposed himself naked to the wounds of his foes, because he is not enclosed in the hold of a fortress. As it is written in the proverbs of Solomon, the man who cannot hold his tongue is most like an unprotected city, with no surrounding walls.][45]

Counterintuitively, this passage suggests that those who do *not* wall in their thoughts and feelings are shut out from their own minds. The failure to create a *ferðlocan*, or 'thought-enclosure', is itself a form of closure, a preclusion of self-reflection that in turn leaves one open and vulnerable.

This association of humans and walls has many ancient antecedents, and as Edward Irving observes, it suffuses Old English poetry. In *The Seafarer* and *The Wife's Lament* the image of a storm battering the sea-wall interchanges with the emotional strain of events, and in *The Wanderer* and *The Ruin* this continual stress is in tension with the binding and bound nature of walls.[46] In *The Ruin*, the process of binding with rings and wire refers ambiguously both to the creative mind and to the making of a wall, which is bound together with metal strips, or rings. I offer a rather literal translation in order to keep the ambiguities visible:

> mod mo[nade   m]yne swiftne gebrægd
> hwætred in hringas,   hygerof gebond
> weallwalan wirum   wundrum togæadre.[47]   (18–20)

> [the astute mind urged a swift purpose,
> firm in rings the resolute mind bound
> wall supports with wires wondrously together.]

The act of binding necessary for creating a wondrous structure corresponds to the act of binding that constitutes a mind stable enough to generate wisdom, and to the binding of words that constitutes poetry.[48] Here, binding *is* creativity. Moreover, as Ruth Wehlau points out, this creative binding of

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45 Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, vol. I, p. 277, lines 14–21, contractions expanded; text slightly emended. For more extended discussion of this passage, see K. Davis, 'Time, Memory, and the Word Hoard' (forthcoming).
46 Irving, Jr, 'Image and Meaning in the Elegies'.
47 Line 18 is damaged and *weallwala* is otherwise unattested. For discussion, see Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*, vol. II, p. 702; and Klinck (ed.), *Old English Elegies*, pp. 214–15.
48 The similar descriptions for binding walls and binding poetic words are often noted. Both Irving, Jr ('Image and Meaning') and P. Dailey ('Questions of Dwelling') reference it in proximity to this passage.

walls and poetry also parallels the act of God's creation.[49] For example, *The Order of the World* – a little-studied lyric about the writing of poetry – suggests that a thoughtful man should inquire about the mystery of creation, and 'bewriten in gewitte wordhordes cræft, / fæstnian ferðsefan, þencan forð teala' [19–20; write in his mind the craft of the word-hoard, fasten his thought, think forth well]. Such passages, not infrequent in Old English lyric, emphasize that the mind, like a poem, is composed – bound and fabricated, as is a wall.

This association of mind and poem connects directly to the lyrics' frequent references to the relationship between transience and a solitary being. As I have suggested, the singularity of each human life – the particular events of a life, or *wyrd* – lodges in experience, and yet this experience, transient by nature and thus never graspable as present, exists only as recalled and represented. For this reason, a viable mind relies upon *representation* of that which is always disappearing, and this representation in turn calls upon language and the imaginative faculties that generate poetry. *The Wanderer* recounts memories of people, relationships and things as the matter for 'meditating deeply' ('deope geondþenceð', 89b) and becoming 'wise in mind' ('frod in ferðe', 90a), but it also emphasizes, as does *The Seafarer*, that these mnemonic images are the work of what we would call imagination.[50] *The Seafarer* famously places imaginative capacity and rhetorical play at the centre of the speaker's account of his solitary life at sea, showcasing the mind's ability to think metaphorically, to put one thing in the place of another:

> þær ic ne gehyrde   butan hlimman sæ,
> iscaldne wæg.   Hwilum ylfete song
> dyde ic me to gomene   ganetes hleoþor,
> ond huilpan sweg   fore hleahtor were,
> mæw singende   fore medodrince.   (18–22)

> [There I heard nothing except the roar of the sea,
> the ice-cold way. Sometimes the swan's song
> I made into my amusement, the gannet's cry
> and the curlew's call in place of the laughter of men,
> the singing of a gull in place of mead-drink.]

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49 Wehlau, '*Riddle of Creation*', esp. pp. 33–7.

50 For discussion of imagination in these poems and their relation to Latin passages by Alcuin and Ambrose on the mobility of the faculty called *mens* or *animus*, see Clemoes, '*Mens absentia cogitans*'.

Such imaginative play seems but a preparatory exercise for the excursion in the centre of the poem, which reverses the anthropomorphizing of birds as the speaker's own spirit takes flight:

Forþon nu min hyge hweorfeð   ofer hreþerlocan,
min modsefa   mid mereflode
ofer hwæles eþel   hweorfeð wide,
eorþan sceatas,   cymeð eft to me
gifre ond grædig,   gielleð anfloga,
hweteð on wælweg   hreþer unwearnum
ofer holma gelagu.   (58–64a)

[And so now my spirit circles above its breast-enclosure,
my mind together with the sea's flow
roams widely across the whale's realm,
to the ends of the earth, comes back again to me
ravenous and greedy, the lone-flier calls out,
urges the spirit hastily along the whale's way
over the sea-flood.]

The fruit of these excursions, of course, is the matter of the poem – its evocative survey of dazzling cities and blossoming groves, its intense description of fierce cold and icy storms, its traversal across time to the Roman and other ancient empires, and their decline.[51] The poem's affirmation of imaginative power validates the 'greedy' spirit's mastery of this expanse, a world of historical, geographical and emotional experience similar to the complete account of a life in *The Riming Poem*. Negotiating between singular experience and the general lessons of homily, this affirmation and this historical sweep underwrite the speaker's shift to the plural with 'Uton' [Let us] for the closing exhortation.

   Here too, as in *The Riming Poem*, *The Seafarer* reaches for completeness by tracing things to their very ends – the decline of empires, the ways people die, and (in the future) the end of the world. Again like *The Riming Poem*, but also like the Old English *Soul and Body* poems, the speaker thinks beyond death in order to contemplate life:

Ne mæg him þonne se flæschoma,   þonne him þæt feorg losað
ne swete forswelgan   ne sar gefelan,
ne hond onhreran   ne mid hyge þencan.   (94–6)

51 The mention of 'caseras' [Caesars] in line 82 clearly references Roman and/or other ancient imperial powers, the narrative of which would have been familiar from Orosius' *History Against the Pagans* or the Alfredian translation of it, as well as from works by Bede and Isidore of Seville.

[Then his body will not be able, when it loses its life,
to swallow sweet things, nor feel pain,
nor move a hand, nor think with the mind.]

Imagining even the end of imagining, this passage attempts completeness in a manner akin to negative theology. Through its effort to grasp and represent the whole of a life as well as its parallel in the whole of creation, *The Seafarer*, like so many other Old English lyrics, not only gathers experience as the matter for meditation, but also offers its own composition as a means of contemplating mortality and its relationship to fame. The body, like experience, is transitory, and coming to terms with this transience on earth requires the accumulation of deeds that can be considered as exemplary and will therefore endure as praise among those living afterwards (æftercweþendra / lof lifgendra lastworda betst', 72b–3a]. It is not that experience or the body are rejected, but rather that they cannot be grasped or possessed as such, and therefore can only endure through representation, like the 'soðgied' [1; true song] that *The Seafarer*'s speaker tells of himself. In an important sense, it is literary narrative – whether poetry, prose hagiography, etc. – that produces the exemplary life. Only poetry, however, does so through the judicious binding of words that simulates both Creation and the composition of a resolute mind.

The role of imagination in negotiating between experience and representation is foregrounded as well in *The Dream of the Rood*.[52] Like many other lyrics, this dream vision begins by noting the speaker's solitude – he experienced this vision while other 'voice-bearers dwelled in sleep' ('syðþan reordberend reste wunedon', 3) – and it employs language of enclosure and architecture: the cross is 'bound around with light' ('leohte bewunden', 5b), 'encased in gold' (begoten mid golde', 7a), reaches to the 'corners of the earth' ('foldan sceatum', 8a) and unites 'all glorious creation' ('eall þeos mære gesceaft', 12b). Like other lyrics, too, this poem is self-reflective; indeed, dream visions by nature address the topic of literary creation, in that they frame, and their speakers narrate, a story generated or experienced by the mind in an excursion similar to that of the soaring spirit in *The Seafarer*. As is often the case with dream visions, *The Dream of the Rood* makes this self-referentiality explicit when the cross commands the dreamer to tell others about the vision – in other words, to compose the poem:

52 Krapp (ed.), *Vercelli Book*.

Nu ic þe hate hæleð   min se leofa,
þæt ðu þas gesyhðe   secge mannum,
onwreoh wordum   þæt hit is wuldres beam,
se ðe ælmihtig god   on þrowode
for mancynnes   manegum synnum
ond Adomes   ealdgewyrhtum.   (95–100)

[Now I command you my beloved man
to inform men about this vision
to reveal in words that it is the tree of glory
upon which the almighty god suffered
for the many sins of mankind
and for Adam's ancient deeds.]

Coming from deep within the poem, in the voice of the sacred vision-object itself, this command governs the temporal sequence of the entire narrative, beginning with the speaker's opening 'Hwæt! Ic swefna cyst secgan wylle' [1; Listen! I will tell you the best of dreams] and extending to the closing prayer for redemption. Thus the command binds together the dream frame and the vision, even as it unites the speaker's voice with that of the cross.

The correspondence between the speaker and the cross is one of the most familiar features of this poem: both are wounded and stained as unwilling persecutors of Christ, both are transformed, and both are voices of redemption. This doubleness connects to the poem's riddlic nature: like Riddle 26 discussed above, *The Dream of the Rood* centres on a speaking object whose voice unites two otherwise incompatible states of existence. Just as the voice of Riddle 26 refers to itself as both a living animal and a Gospel book, so the voice of the cross refers to itself as both a tree growing at the edge of a forest and a jewelled cross; in both cases, this bodily transformation results in qualitative change relating to salvation. Such poetic doubling is emphasized throughout *The Dream of the Rood*. As the dreamer beholds the cross, for example, it is sometimes soaked with blood, sometimes adorned with jewels, opposed physical states that, in theological terms, coexist within the object at all times. Just as *The Seafarer* showcases the mind's ability to think metaphorically, to put one thing in the place of another as simultaneously the same and different, so *The Dream of the Rood* demonstrates the necessity of this imaginative capacity to the speaker's identification with the cross and his ability to imagine his own participation in salvation history. This history, like *wyrd*, is never fully determined or foreclosed: it is entwined

with human agency, both political and intellectual, and thus guarantees an open future.[53]

Finally, the closing frame of *The Dream of the Rood* turns to the relation between exemplarity and transience. The dreamer's identification with the cross mediates his concern with fame. Just before commanding the dreamer to tell its story, the cross declares that because of its role in the Crucifixion it will now be honoured by all creation and can heal those who are awed by it. In the closing frame the dreamer echoes the cross's words: 'Is me nu lifes hyht / þæt ic þone sigebeam secan mote / ana oftor þonne ealle men, / well weorþian' [126b–9a; It is now my life's hope that I might seek the tree of victory more often than all men, honour it well]. The honour, of course, resides in the poem, and only at this point does the dreamer declare that he hopes 'daga gehwylce hwænne me dryhtnes rod, / þe ic her on eorðan ær sceawode, / on þysson lænan life gefetige' [136–8; each day for when the cross of the lord, which I saw here on earth, will fetch (me) from this transitory life].

Transience and history

Transience, then, is the basis of fame and of poetry, the movement that opens narrative, the occasion for imagination and representation – and these are also the conditions for thinking historically. As Walter Benjamin put it, 'The word "history" stands written on the countenance of nature in the characters of transience.'[54] Old English lyrics usually incorporate history through formal elements, such as the *ubi sunt* catalogue or meditation upon ruin, which enable a shift from contemplation of personal experience to that of generations past. The *ubi sunt* catalogue was long a favourite of poets and homilists for its treatment of transience and for its openness to rhetorical invention and variation.[55] *The Wanderer* contains the most extensive *ubi sunt* catalogue in Old English poetry, spoken by a man 'wise in mind' ('frod in ferðe', 90a) as he contemplates the 'wealsteal' [foundation] of an ancient ruin and remembers battles of the distant past:

> Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago?   Hwær cwom maþþumgyfa?
> Hwær cwom symbla gesetu?   Hwær sindon seledreamas?
> Eala beorht bune.   Eala byrnwiga.

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53 See further K. Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, chap. 4.
54 Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 177.
55 See DeSciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 108, 137. As is well known, the *ubi sunt* motif derived mainly from Isidore of Seville's *Synonyma*.

Eala þeodnes þrym.   Hu seo þrag gewat,
genap under nihthelm,   swa heo no wære.   (92–6)

[Where has the horse gone? Where has the kinsman gone? Where the treasure-
     giver?
Where has the banquet-place gone? Where are the joys of the hall?
Lo the bright cup. Lo the armed warrior.
Lo the ruler's power. How the time has departed,
grown dark under the helm of night, as if it never were.]

Such contemplation upon the remnant of an ancient foundation opens the
topic of history. It is not that ruins signify a lost history; to the contrary, ruins
generate historiography. Their fragmentation and their silence allow the
postulation of the *present*, or as Michel de Certeau explains, they provide
'the *place* for a discourse considering whatever preceded it to be "dead" . . .
Breakage is therefore the postulate of interpretation (which is constructed as
of the present time) and its object (divisions organizing representations that
must be reinterpreted).'[56] The past is made relevant through its postulation *as
past* to a present that is constituted as such through historical interpretation.

   Thus the ruined foundation prompts *The Wanderer*'s *ubi sunt* catalogue,
a gathering of people, relations and things offered as comparable to those
experienced in the speaker's personal life. This catalogue likewise com-
prises a thought-hoard available for meditation, but on a historical scale.
Like *The Riming Poem* and *The Seafarer*, which pare living experience down
to the verge of non-existence, or like the *Soul and Body* poems that speak
from beyond the grave, *The Wanderer* gestures towards a complete hold on
past time by imagining its extinction: 'Hu seo þrag gewat . . . swa heo no
wære' [How the time departs . . . as if it never were].[57] The speaker places
this disappearance of time in the context of the transitoriness of *all* things,
and ultimately the end of the world: 'eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð'
[110; the foundation of this entire earth will become empty]. Only then, just
as in *The Riming Poem* and *The Seafarer*, does the poem move to its closing,
homiletic exhortation. Exemplarity becomes generalizable only when it is
abstracted, or in Certeau's terms, made 'dead', and thus available for
interpretation.

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56 Certeau, *Writing of History*, p. 4.
57 *The Wife's Lament* similarly describes the bond between the lovers 'swa hit no wære'
    [24b; as if it never were], but without a turn to meditation. For perceptive discussion of
    this passage and of time in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, see Bately, 'Time and the
    Passing of Time'.

Deor similarly offers a catalogue, a compilation of legendary and historical figures whose tragic existence in the distant past exemplifies transience itself, with each brief narrative culminating in the refrain 'Þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg' [From that it passed away, so it may from this]. The syntax of this refrain is notoriously difficult; its subject is left unstated, but 'þæs' and 'þisses' are likely 'genitives of point of time from which'.[58] In any case, the poem's emphasis is on the past *as* past, with the series of remembrances leading to a contemplative scene reminiscent of *The Wanderer*'s closing. A sorrowful figure sits with darkened mind, but is then able to perceive in transience the potential for change in both grief and prosperity. Reflection upon representations of past events enables his grasp upon the coursing of time and his own position in it. *Deor* then turns to the transitory position of the *scop* himself, and thus – like so many Old English lyrics – addresses the conditions of its own creation. Just as the passing of tragic figures enables their representation and interpretation, so the *scop*, as he knows from his own stories, is founded upon transience.

Passages such *as ubi sunt* catalogues and contemplations of ruin have been caught between two opposing critical paradigms: one that finds contempt for a mutable world in which any sort of earthly futurity is meaningless, and one that finds nostalgia and an oppressive sense of loss. These interpretations miss both the providential and the historical aspects of the lyrics, which neither reject nor long for the past. To the contrary, their contemplation of transience founds their work on the relationship of mind, imagination, representation and salvation. These poems eschew nostalgia for its capitulation to *wyrd*, but they value crafted representation of the past *as* past, which – like representations of personal experience – allows for communal as well as personal meditation, necessary conditions for the steadfastness of mind required to attain salvation.

The short, fragmentary poem *The Ruin* has been the principal focus of attention to ruins in Old English poetry, and most critics recognize it as celebratory of former splendour, rather than as nostalgic.[59] This is the case not just because the poem appears to end optimistically, but because it consistently emphasizes the parallel, as noted above, between the artistic

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58 This is Bruce Mitchell's suggestion. For discussion, see Klinck (ed.), *Old English Elegies*, p. 160; and Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*, vol. ii, p. 599.

59 See, e.g., Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*, vol. ii, p. 699; Treharne (ed. and trans.), *Old and Middle English*, p. 84; and P. Dailey, 'Questions of Dwelling', p. 185. Trilling, *Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, grants that the poem does not end in nostalgia (pp. 53–4), but nonetheless suggests that 'the speaker's gaze upon the wall is suffused with a nostalgic melancholy' (p. 56).

creation of former builders and the composition of the poem, which in this case is also the composition of a past that is celebrated, not mourned. 'Wrætlic is þes wealstan – wyrde gebræcon' [1; Wondrous is this wall-stone, broken by *wyrd*'] the poem begins. No other Old English poem captures quite so precisely the foundational nature of transience – to life, narrative, experience, history, and an open future.

Chapter 14

Literature in pieces: female sanctity and the relics of early women's writing

DIANE WATT

Credimus autem multo plura quam reperiantur extitisse, que aut ex illius eui torpentium scriptorum negligentia nequaquam litteris mandata fuerunt, aut descripta paganorum rabie ecclesias ac cenobia depopulante inter cetera perierunt.

> Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, *Miracvla sancte Ætheldrethe*[1]

[And we believe that there are many more (miracles) than are now to be found, which through the carelessness of the sluggish scribes of that age were never committed to writing, or were recorded but have perished among other things when the fury of the heathen laid waste to churches and monasteries.]

It is the sound of memory at work, creating a necklace of narrative.

> Jane Urquhart, *The Underpainter*, p. 9

Women's literary historiography

Literary histories of English women's writing have, traditionally, had little time for the early medieval period. Early medieval women are excluded from teleologies that celebrate the emergence of authorship and literature, understood in specific and restrictive terms, and that only acknowledge certain narrowly defined forms of textual production. They are omitted from linear temporal paradigms that already struggle to accommodate the vernacular visionary writings of the later medieval period and the devout poetry of the Renaissance, but which incorporate far more easily the dramatic texts of the seventeenth century and the prose writings of the eighteenth and nineteenth. One example of such an exclusive literary history is *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, now in its third edition (2007). While more self-consciously

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1 In Goscelin, *Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, pp. 98–9.

aware than the previous editions of its theoretical and methodological limitations, the revised introduction nevertheless follows the earlier versions in asserting that 'we find no texts in the Old English period that have been definitively identified as composed by women'.[2] With this claim, and without any further consideration of what is a 'text' or what assumptions underlie the phrase 'composed by women', the entire literary history of women prior to *c.* 1170 (the date when Marie de France, the earliest author included in the revised *Norton Anthology*, flourished) is summarily dismissed.

This pattern is, somewhat surprisingly, repeated in more period-specific women's literary histories.[3] *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, edited by Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (2003) includes the early Middle Ages in its chronological table and makes reference to a number of European women in the centuries leading up to 1150 (such as Radegund, Dhuoda, Hrotswith of Gandersheim, Hildegard of Bingen, Héloïse) and also some key English women from the same period (such as Hild of Streonæshalch or Whitby, Æthelburh and Hildelith of Barking, Leoba and Boniface's other women correspondents, Eve of Angers and Christina of Markyate).[4] However, once again, with minor exceptions (a fleeting reference to the anonymous Old English poems *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*) the early medieval period is simply overlooked.[5] Indeed, histories of medieval women's writing that do include the early medieval period, such as Laurie A. Finke's *Women's Writing in English: Medieval England* (1999), or *The History of British Women's Writing, 700–1500*, edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt (2012), are the exception rather than the rule.[6] This exclusion of the period before 1150 from women's literary history is, of course, all the more problematic because even later medieval women writers continue to fit uncomfortably within the dominant masculinist paradigms of traditional literary history, as is so vividly illustrated by the scant attention paid to women in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, edited by David Wallace (1999) and, more recently, Christopher Cannon's *The Grounds of English Literature* (2004).[7]

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2 Gilbert and Gubar (eds.), *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, vol. 1, p. 1.
3 Lees and Overing make a similar point in *Double Agents*, p. 6.
4 Dinshaw and Wallace (eds.), *Medieval Women's Writing*, pp. viii–xii.
5 Summit, 'Women and Authorship', p. 95.
6 In McAvoy and Watt (eds.), *History of British Women's Writing*, see esp. Lees and Overing, 'Women and the Origins of English Literature'.
7 See my review of *The Cambridge History*, 'Manly Middle Ages'. In his discussion of the Bayeux Tapestry, for example, Cannon does not consider the possible roles of women in its patronage or production (*Grounds of English Literature*, pp. 24–9); contrast van Houts, *Memory and Gender*, pp. 101–2.

Studies which have addressed women's different relationship to authorship and literary production in the later Middle Ages have examined such questions as women's exclusion from medieval definitions of authority (associated with the classical writers and Church patriarchs) and the problems of attribution posed by anonymous texts; women's more limited access to formal education, especially outside the convents and courts; their reliance on readers, secretaries and scribes; and their more 'indirect' engagement with writing (from a modern perspective at least) as visionaries, translators and compilers.[8] These issues are also relevant to the early medieval period, where the problem of the dearth of evidence of 'women's writing' is felt all the more acutely. Gilbert and Gubar are of course wrong to suggest that there are 'no texts in the Old English period that have been definitively identified as composed by women'. By including the phrase 'definitively identified', Gilbert and Gubar neatly sidestep the controversial issue of anonymous texts for which a case for attribution to women might be made. Yet, aside from this omission, there still survives a body of texts by women, albeit composed in Latin, from before 1150, including prayers, hymns and verses.[9] Some of the surviving texts were composed by English women overseas. Hygeburg or Hugeburc (*fl.* 760–86), an Anglo-Saxon nun who joined the Benedictine monastery of Heidenheim in Germany, wrote lives of the brothers St Willibald and St Wynnebald; the former includes an early pilgrim travel narrative.[10] Hygeburg may lay claim to the title of first English woman writer of a full-length literary work whose name is known, but the letters of Leoba, formerly Leobgyth (*c.* 710–82), an Anglo-Saxon missionary in Germany, and of the other female correspondents of Boniface and his circle, provide more examples of early women's engagement with literary cultures. Leoba's first letter to Boniface notably includes four lines of Latin verse, and she states that she learnt the art of poetry from her teacher Eadburg.[11] There is evidence that more Latin writing must have existed within England, including the early twelfth-century work, now lost, of Muriel of Wilton, described as 'inclyta versificatrix' [famous poetess].[12]

Evidently and unsurprisingly, the earliest medieval women's writing was produced by abbesses and nuns – the double monasteries of nuns and monks

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8 Finke, *Women's Writing in English*; Summit, 'Women and Authorship'; Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing*, pp. 1–18.
9 Dronke, *Women Writers*, pp. 30–5; J. Stevenson, 'Anglo-Latin Women Poets', and *Women Latin Poets*.
10 See Head, 'Who is the Nun from Heidenheim?'
11 Boniface *et al.*, *Briefe des Bonifatius*, pp. 52– 3 (trans. *English Correspondence*, pp. 110–11); see also Fell, 'Boniface Correspondence'.
12 J. Stevenson, 'Anglo-Latin Women Poets,' p. 95; Tatlock, 'Muriel'.

were centres of scholarship and literary culture – and thus certain types of literature were favoured by women. As we will see, Abbess Hildelith of Barking (*fl.* 700) wrote visionary accounts herself, which did not survive. Hagiographies were also popular: an early but lost life of Hild (614–80) may have been authored by nuns in their subject's own monastery. Foundation narratives derived from versions originally attributable to women that *have* come down to us include an Old English fragment of a Life of St Mildrith: the legend itself dates to the time of Mildrith's successor, Eadburg of Minster-in-Thanet (*c.* 732–51), who translated Mildrith's remains and fostered her cult.[13] These texts were concerned with establishing the saintly reputations of the early abbesses, and securing the future of the religious houses. In the later period, following the Benedictine Reform, it was royal women in particular who played a key role in cult-making. Queens Emma (*c.* 988–1052) and Edith (*c.* 1029–75) commissioned family histories which focused on the lives of their male relatives, but in which they themselves figured.[14] By embracing a more fluid or elastic definition of textual production as *collaborative* – a definition that allows us to take into account processes such as patronage – and by paying attention to audience as well as authorship, it is possible to grasp more fully the nature and extent of women's engagement with and contribution to literary culture in the early medieval period. Furthermore, by challenging the preconception that the Old English period simply ended with the Norman invasion, and by acknowledging continuities into the centuries that followed, it is possible to trace a long-standing tradition of the transmission and rewriting of texts about saintly women that spans the entire Middle Ages.[15]

The question of 'literary historiography' is crucial to understanding early medieval women's engagement with literary culture. One point to emphasize is that many of the arguments put forward to explain and, indeed, to counter the apparent dearth of women writers in the late Middle Ages, do not fully account for the greater intensity of the problem in the early medieval period. Allen J. Frantzen points out that most early medieval writing exists in only partial form and that fragments are indeed 'a staple

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13 Hollis, 'Minster-in-Thanet Foundation Story'.
14 Campbell (ed. and trans.), *Encomium Emmae reginae*; Barlow (ed. and trans.), *Life of King Edward*. See Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, esp. pp. 28–52; and Tyler, 'Fictions of Family'.
15 On the continuity of traditions of female sanctity, see, e.g., Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*; and Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives*, esp. pp. 57–66.

of Anglo-Saxon culture'.[16] Unsurprisingly, then, there remain only pieces or traces of early medieval women's writing. Furthermore, while scholars may continue to debate whether the early Anglo-Saxon period represented a golden age for women's scholarship and learning compared to subsequent centuries, it would simply be wrong to attempt to explain the early dearth of women's writing with a progress narrative that claims that the emergence and development of women's writing runs parallel to greater access across time to literacy and learning.[17] Feminist historians have long argued that women's history does not simply mirror that of men, and that the great ruptures and transitions of traditional chronological accounts do not, necessarily, equally apply to women. One powerful recent response has been to emphasize continuity in women's history instead of change.[18] For students of the history of women in early medieval England, somewhat different considerations arise because, arguably, some ruptures and transitions *did* have a greater and more destructive impact on women. I noted above that Dinshaw and Wallace's *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing* does include the period before 1150 in its chronological table, and some key women are mentioned therein. Nevertheless, the emphasis is very much on *beginnings*: '*c*. 424 Anglo-Saxon incursions into England begin'; '665–75 Barking Abbey founded'; '889 Marriage of Alfred's daughter Aethelflaed'; 'Late 1060s–mid 1090s The Bayeux Tapestry depicting the events of the Norman Conquest is designed and executed'.[19] Yet endings are important for women's history too, and, perhaps especially in relation to early medieval women's history, it is vital that equal attention is paid to them in order for discontinuities to be properly understood. A very different perspective is seen if, for example, the destruction of the convents and the slaughter of the nuns by the Vikings is highlighted, and the consequent loss of books and other cultural artefacts, or if the negative impact of the tenth-century Benedictine Reform on aristocratic religious women's power and privilege is traced. One significant change in the later Anglo-Saxon period was the replacement of double monasteries with segregated female communities, and the loss of educational and literary opportunities that this entailed. At the same time, some historians of women have suggested, compellingly,

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16 Frantzen, 'Fragmentation of Cultural Studies', p. 320. Frantzen's theorization of fragmentary texts as 'fragments of cultural processes now cut off from the social worlds in which they once functioned' (p. 321) has considerable relevance to my own argument about the surviving traces of early women's writing.

17 Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, pp. 1–14.

18 Bennett, *History Matters*, pp. 60–81.

19 Dinshaw and Wallace (eds.), *Medieval Women's Writing*, pp. viii–x.

that the impact of the Norman invasion on women can be easily over-stated.[20] One of the most developed critiques of traditional approaches to history is found in Judith Bennett's *History Matters*, in which she argues that feminist historians need to be 'less safe and more offensive'.[21] A key study of women in Anglo-Saxon textual culture that is willing to take risks is Clare Lees and Gillian R. Overing's *Double Agents* (first published 2001).[22] Lees and Overing suggest that behind the absence of women lies the structural misogyny of Anglo-Saxon clerical culture. In their brilliant first chapter, Lees and Overing argue that both the Anglo-Saxon religious historian Bede and twentieth-century Anglo-Saxonists have conspired in their representation of Cædmon's *Hymn* as the 'birth' of English poetry to overlook the role of Cædmon's patron, Abbess Hild, in this originary narrative. Indeed, as we will see, a clerical writer such as Bede was not only capable of forgetting women in their roles as patrons or authors, but he also dismissed them as authoritative witnesses, and freely appropriated their work, without acknowledgement, into his own.[23] The extent of this systematic overwriting of women's writing of the early medieval period should not be underestimated.

Elsewhere, I have argued that it is possible to create a 'tradition' of women writers that included medieval women, 'albeit not along continuous vertical masculinist lines of influence and anxiety of influence, but along broken and sometimes horizontal lines of congruence and commonality in relation to production and reception'.[24] It is worth pausing to consider not *why* vertical lines of literary influence do not work for early women's writing (the dearth of texts makes this self-evident), but just how restrictive such conceptualizations are. Vertical models of literary history are often expressed in terms of genealogy: writers have their literary forefathers and descendants. Such genealogical framing privileges the masculine, of course, but is also elitist in its underpinning (only the aristocracy and the wealthy can reconstruct their genealogies). The feminist response of replacing patrilineage with matrilineage addresses part of the problem, and also mirrors the spiritual teleologies of the reconstructed, and at times spurious, histories of the early convents, as

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20 Hollis *et al.* (eds.), *Writing the Wilton Women*, p. 8; Klinck, 'Anglo-Saxon Women and the Law'.
21 Bennett, *History Matters*, p. 154.
22 Lees and Overing quote Bennett in the revised preface to the 2009 reissue of *Double Agents*, p. xiii.
23 See also Rudolf of Fulda, whose life of Leoba is, according to Weston, 'appropriated . . . from the memory and oral tradition of her nuns' ('*Sanctimoniales cum sanctimoniale*', p. 51). Weston also discusses Bede's *HE*, IV in this essay.
24 Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing*, p. 159.

transmitted by the later writers of the Lives of saints of Ely, which draw out the familial connections between the sisters Æthelthryth (c. 636–79) and Seaxburh (c. 655 to c. 700), and follow a maternal line from Seaxburh through her daughter Eormenhild (d. c. 700), and her child Wærburh (d. 700), and so on.[25] The idea of creating female genealogies may even have its origins in female-authored Anglo-Saxon Lives.[26] Jocelyn Wogan-Browne – discussing a thirteenth-century Life of the founding abbess of Ely, written by a nun called Marie, possibly of Chatteris – has argued that such models are potentially subversive: 'the virgin foundress simultaneously disrupts biological lines of filiation and creates spiritual genealogies'.[27] Other scholars are more critical. Susan Ridyard draws attention to the ways that the different generations of women seem to compete in levels of sanctity.[28] Lees and Overing point out that the dual emphasis on virginity and what they term 'spiritual maternity' both 'conceals and devalues real connections between women' and 'minimizes the value and reality of physical maternity'.[29] A further point that should be made in a discussion of genealogical metaphors is that familial lines do die out. Again, this seems particularly pertinent in the case of women's history: even the saintly history of Barking (the Anglo-Saxon female foundation that enjoyed the most continuous history, having been re-established in the tenth-century as a Benedictine convent) came to an end with the Reformation. However, more radical attacks on ideas of genealogy come not from feminism, but from queer theory. Foucauldian models of genealogy have been crucial to queer histories, yet queer historians and literary critics have recently launched a full-scale attack on traditional periodization, linear chronologies and heterosexual reproductive teleologies, arguing for a more radical 'unhistoricism' and demanding 'acts of queering that would suspend the assurance that the only modes of knowing the past are either those that regard the past as wholly other or those that can assimilate it to a present assumed identical to itself'.[30] While we might not want to accept wholesale a de-chronological approach that would simply reify our sense that early medieval women's writing is out of time, the idea that the texts considered here might be seen to touch other later texts, across time, and

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25 See Goscelin, *Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*.
26 See Hollis, 'Minster-in-Thanet Foundation Story', pp. 46, 56–8.
27 Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives*, p. 210.
28 Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 91.
29 Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, p. 43.
30 Goldberg and Menon, 'Queering History', p. 1616; Carolyn Dinshaw and Karma Lochrie, letter to the editor, *PMLA*, 121 (2006), 837–8; Menon, reply, *PMLA*, 121 (2006), 838–9.

without firm evidence of direct influence, can be enabling.[31] Rather than seeking to establish direct continuities where they do not appear to exist, we should embrace the disrupted, discontinuous, fragmentary nature of the history that has come down to us. The history of early medieval women's writing is that of a literature reduced to pieces; a corpus of work broken up like the corpse of a saint that has been subjected to relic hunters, thieves and heathen invaders. While an approach that acknowledges loss and emphasizes fragmentation cannot counter fully the elitist character of the surviving evidence of early medieval women's literary culture, it can make it possible to explore connections that have not previously been visible. In the next section, I will examine some of the evidence that early women's writing was deliberately appropriated and overwritten by clerical authors. In the final section of this essay, I will examine some of the ways in which the early medieval women saints considered here touch one later woman to whom they are not overtly related: Christina of Markyate (*c.* 1096 to after 1155).

The overwriting of female sanctity

As I have suggested, the main evidence of early women's engagement with literary culture in England derives from two related genres: saints' Lives and visionary writing. In terms of subject matter, its primary but not only focus was on female sanctity. My central argument here is that early women's texts were overwritten by monastic historians, hagiographers and writers of works of instruction and/or encouragement for women. It is worth pausing on my choice of language here: why 'overwrite'? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the verb 'overwrite' can simply mean 'to rewrite' (4). The examples cited by the *OED* relate to Shakespeare's adaptations of his sources, and to discussions of the Old Testament. However, 'overwrite' can also mean 'to write (something) over other writing' (2a). I argue here that, metaphorically, this is what the monastic writers do: they write their texts over the women's own accounts, whether written or oral. In this sense they create a palimpsest: 'a manuscript in which later writing has been superimposed on earlier (effaced) writing' (*OED* 2a) or 'a thing likened to such a writing surface, esp. in having been re-used or altered while still retaining traces of its earlier form; a multilayered record' (2b). In what follows, I am concerned with identifying the traces of the earliest women's writing in the surviving record. However, I am also concerned with thinking about the processes or acts of effacement

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31 See Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*.

that took place. The sense that such acts were deliberate is captured in the meaning of 'overwrite' as it is used in a computing context: 'to destroy (data) by entering new data in its place; to place new data in (a memory location, a file, etc.) and destroy the existing contents' (*OED* 2c). Such data, if overwritten completely, are unrecoverable; although copies may still exist, at least for some time, as for example would be the case with web pages that have been cached by major search engines. For the male writers discussed here, overwriting was, presumably, not viewed as destructive, but a means of improving on their sources; and copies of those sources, the 'underwriting', may well have remained in circulation for some time after the overwritten texts were produced. The very fact that multiple versions of saints' Lives survive suggests that the process of overwriting was an inherent aspect of a genre which required the continual revision, updating and translation of earlier sources.

Overwriting might be compared to overpainting. The *OED* defines the verb 'overpaint' as 'to paint over; to cover with another colour or layer of paint; to form such a layer over (something)' (1). This definition is inadequate as it does not recognize the distinction between 'overpainting' as technique practised by the original artist whereby the overpainting and the underpainting work together to create a distinct effect; 'overpainting' as a process of restoring a damaged work; and 'overpainting' as a means by which artists might adapt an earlier work of art that is deemed old-fashioned, or inappropriate in some way, to reflect contemporary standards and tastes. This sort of 'overpainting' is sometimes linked to censorship. It is this last meaning that might be most useful in helping us understand what the monastic writers discussed here attempted to achieve. Such writers try to ensure the preservation and transmission of aspects of the underwriting, even as they adapt it. Dana Oswald's study of different kinds of erasure within the illustrations and written descriptions of monsters in the manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon *Wonders of the East* captures the complexity of these processes.[32] Oswald identifies three types of erasure: never drawing, removal and revision. The third type, revision, is closest to 'overpainting' and 'overwriting', and Oswald's words of caution are apposite: 'It is easy to miss the traces of what was there before because they are buried under and perhaps even incorporated into the newly constructed and censored meaning.'[33] My use of the word 'overwrite' attempts to keep the multiple connotations 'destruction', 'preservation', 'control' and 'suppression' simultaneously in play.

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32 Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality*, pp. 27–65.
33 *Ibid.*, pp. 53–4.

Bede

The first example of the overwriting of female sanctity comes from the beginning of our period: Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*. Book IV, a work as a whole concerned with chronicling the foundation of the English Church, includes the lives of three founding abbesses: Hild of Whitby, Æthelburh (Ethelburga) of Barking (*fl.* 664), and Æthelthryth (Etheldreda) of Ely. The lives of all three women, who wielded considerable political as well as religious power, suggest that Anglo-Saxon female sanctity fitted into a long-standing tradition of women's visions and prophecy that originated in the pre-Christian era and continued to the Reformation and beyond.[34] Bede's accounts of these elite women elide their sources, which were almost certainly lives of the foundresses originally composed within their own religious houses. It is certainly reasonable to assume that in IV.23 Bede must have drawn on a lost life of Hild from the double monastery at Whitby.[35] Certainly, Whitby was a site of literary production, and it may be that the sisters themselves played a central role: Stephanie Hollis hypothesizes that the Whitby *Life of Gregory* could have been written by a nun.[36] In failing to acknowledge his sources, then, Bede adapts Hild's life to fit his own agenda, part of which seems to be to remove surviving traces of Hild's own scholarly textual community.[37] This is vividly illustrated by the writing out of Hild's role as patron of the poet Cædmon in IV.24, analysed by Lees and Overing, as mentioned above. However, this is not the limit of Bede's agenda, as he also very deliberately excludes from IV.23 any mention of the Synod of Whitby, over which Hild herself presided (discussion of her role is limited to a couple of sentences in III.25, pp. 298–9, where he mentions briefly that she took the Celtic side, whereas Bede himself took the Roman side).[38] In his account of Hild's life, Bede emphasizes her personal devotion and her close association with Bishop Aidan and her role as spiritual mother of bishops, but without making it explicit that Hild was personally responsible for educating these men. The religious and political were profoundly imbricated with one another, as Hild's career illustrates. Yet Bede initiates a tendency to emphasize the religious over the political when discussing female saints and visionaries that continues right up to present-day historicism. Bede is also very selective in what he reveals

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34 See Watt, *Secretaries of God*.
35 Cross, 'Lost Life of Hilda'.
36 Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, pp. 125–7.
37 See *ibid.*, pp. 243–70; and P. H. Blair, 'Whitby as a Centre of Learning'.
38 Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, p. 31.

about Hild's personal life. Aside from recording her royal family connections and her conversion, he reveals little more about the first half of her life, choosing instead to dwell on the events that followed her profession. His reason for this may have been, as Hollis hypothesizes, that Hild was a widow, rather than a virgin, when she became a nun and that she did not comfortably conform to his own expectations of female sanctity.[39]

In his account of her life, Bede effectively de-politicizes and de-contextualizes Hild's sanctity, remoulding it to fit his own model. He even omits from his Life her two powerful relatives and allies, who succeeded her as abbesses of Whitby, Ælfflæd (654–713) and her mother Eanflæd (626 to after 685), despite discussing them elsewhere.[40] Yet one of these women probably commissioned the writing of Hild's lost life. What traces, if any, then remain of the underwriting, the life, or lives, that Bede drew on, the text, or texts, that more closely reflected the interests and concerns of Whitby itself, and that may have been authored by Hild's fellow nuns? It seems reasonable to assume that Bede's narrative of the dream of a necklace experienced by Hild's mother Breguswith comes, if in mediated form, from his source (HE, IV.23, pp. 410–11). Breguswith understood the necklace to represent her daughter, who would become a shining example to others. This prophetic vision was mirrored by others at the end of Hild's life: visions of the ascension of Hild's soul witnessed by nuns at Whitby and its neighbouring house at Hackness (HE, IV.23, pp. 413–14). These visions serve to authorize the holiness of the saint and her community in positive terms which the nuns themselves would have recognized and considered worthy of commemoration.[41] Here Bede has no choice but to acknowledge the authority of the visionaries themselves – Breguswith, Begu (the nun at Hackness) and an anonymous Whitby novice. Indeed Bede even names another female witness to validate Begu's dream: Frigyth, who presided over Hackness.

Visions, whether of the dying, experienced by the dying, or concerning the dead, also figure in Bede's account of the early history of Barking Abbey, founded by Eorcenwold for his sister Æthelburh (HE, IV.6–10). According to Bede, Abbess Æthelburh's death is predicted by a vision of the ascension of her soul (HE, IV.9), experienced by Torhtgyth, a close ally of Æthelburh within the convent, but this is only one of a series of such visions experienced in the monastery.[42] Most notably, Torhtgyth has a vision of the dead abbess calling her

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39 Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, p. 248.
40 Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, pp. 31–2, 68–71.
41 Watt, 'Authorizing Female Piety', pp. 242–6.
42 See Weston, '*Sanctimoniales cum sanctimoniale*', pp. 35–43.

to heaven as she herself lies dying, but there are others, including visions relating to the positioning of the nuns' cemetery. Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* includes a number of prophecies of death, and visions of the otherworld and of the dying and the dead, which reflects how widespread such revelations and other tomb miracles were in the seventh century. Many of these are concerned with male visionaries, rulers, saints and sinners, such as Oswald, Fursa, Chad, Cuthbert and Dryhthelm. However, there is compelling evidence that such visions were of particular significance within a female context and circulated among female communities. Around 715 or 716 Boniface wrote to Eadburg as follows:

> Rogabas me, soror carissima, ut admirandas visiones de illo redivivo, qui nuper in monasterio Milburge abbatisse, mortuus est et revixit, quae ei ostense sunt, scribendo intimare et transmittere curarem, quamadmodum istas veneranda abbatissa Hildelida referenti didici.

> [Thou didst ask me, dear sister, to send thee an account as the venerable Abbess Hildelida (Hildelith) gave it to me of the wonderful vision seen by the man who recently, in the convent of Abbess Milburga (Milburg, abbess of Much Wenlock), died and came back to life.] [43]

Hildelith was, of course, Æthelburh's successor at Barking. Although Boniface rejects Hildelith's account of the vision of the monk of Much Wenlock in favour of the testimony of the visionary himself, this fleeting reference indicates that Hildelith had written down a now lost text of the vision, which she then passed on to others. Furthermore it confirms that Hildelith was part of Boniface's textual community. In this context it is worth remembering that Barking under Hildelith was a centre of literary culture and learning, and that Aldhelm's *De uirginitate*, which was written for Hildelith and her nuns, praises their skill and eloquence in letter-writing. Aldhelm also indicates that they wrote verse, and were interested in histories and chronicles as well as Scripture and biblical commentaries.[44] Stylistically Aldhelm's text, with its overwrought and thus, in another sense of the word, overwritten Latin, provides compelling evidence of the high levels of literacy and learning of Barking. This assessment is supported by Bede, who indicates that the key source for his accounts in the *Historia ecclesiastica* of the visions of Barking, including those of Torhtgyth, was a 'liber' [book] or 'libellus' [pamphlet] (*HE*, IV.10, pp. 364–5) that had been compiled there and widely distributed:

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43 Boniface *et al.*, *Briefe des Bonifatius*, p. 8 (trans. *English Correspondence*, p. 78); see Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 243–72.

44 Aldhelm, *Prose Works*, pp. 59, 61–2. The poetic version of *De uirginitate* was also written at the request of the nuns.

In hoc etenim monasterio plura uirtutum sunt signa patrata, quae et ad memoriam aedificationemque sequentium ab his qui nouere descripta haben-tur a multis; e quibus et nos aliqua historiae nostrae ecclesiasticae inserere curauimus. (*HE*, IV.7, pp. 356–7)

[In this monastery many signs and miracles were performed which have been written down by those who were acquainted with them as an edifying memorial for succeeding generations and copies are in the possession of many people. Some of these we have taken care to insert in this *History*.]

It is likely that Torhtgyth's visions, which are explicitly recognized here as a form of memorialization, were indeed originally recorded by the nuns them-selves. It is striking that, according to this account, they seem to have been widely circulated. Thus they represent at least aspects of the underwriting that lies behind Bede's version. Hildelith, as Æthelburh's successor and concerned to ensure the continuity of Barking by fostering the cult of its foundress, would have commissioned the writing of this *liber*, and she may even have written it herself. Yet Bede makes no mention of this in his discussion of Hildelith in IV.10.

Within the *Historia ecclesiastica*, Bede's ideal of female sanctity is, however, neither Hild nor Æthelburh, but Æthelthryth of Ely, whose life and death he describes in IV.19–20, and about whom he composes his Hymn (IV.20).[45] This royal saint, who succeeded in remaining chaste through two marriages, represents for Bede the ideal of virginity. For Bede, the events of Æhelthryth's life – including her marriages – are less important than those surrounding her death and the subsequent translation of her body by her sister, and successor at Ely, Seaxburh. This is because when Æthelthryth's tomb is opened her corpse is found to be incorrupt and the tumour on her neck, which was responsible for her death, is miraculously healed. Bede cites this as evidence of her virginal purity. What is so remarkable about Bede's account of Æthelthryth, however, is that of the three lives of saintly abbesses, this is perhaps the one that most minimizes or overwrites the authority of women. Just as Bede passes quickly over Æthelthryth's married life, so while alluding to Æthelthryth's aunt, Æbbe, abbess of Coldingham (*HE*, IV.20), he makes no reference to Æthelthryth's familial ties to Hild, even though, as Virginia Blanton suggests, 'it is more than reasonable to believe that the women knew one another well and were in some way cognizant of their mutual work as leaders of monastic communities'.[46] Bede also overlooks

45 Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, pp. 19–63.
46 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

important information about Seaxburh. Rosalind C. Love points out that Bede makes no reference to Seaxburh's own foundation at Minster-in-Sheppey, or to her daughter Eormenhild.[47] Seaxburh's other daughter, Earcongota, is discussed only in another context at *HE* III.8. Seaxburh, who evidently cultivated her sister's cult, was responsible for ordering the exhumation and, with her nuns, she opened the old coffin, washed and reclothed the body and carried it to its new resting place. However, it is not Seaxburh but Bishop Wilfrid who is named as a key witness to the preservation of Æthelthryth's corpse, while the physician Cynefrith, who attended the dying saint, is cited by Bede as his direct source, and his words are taken as ultimate confirmation of the miracle (*HE*, IV.19).[48] Remarkably, there are no visions of the saint's ascension experienced by the nuns of her monastery in this narrative. Once again, Bede may have had access to a life of the founding saint produced within her own monastery: Blanton suggests that Æthelthryth's speech in *HE*, IV.19 (pp. 396–7) in which she described her illness as punishment for former vanity may be derived from it.[49] Even so, compared to the accounts of Hild and Æthelburh, Æthelthryth's life is, it seems, the life that is most heavily overwritten.

Goscelin of Saint-Bertin

Hollis is surely correct, then, in her claim that in the *Historia ecclesiastica* Bede 'significantly underrepresented' women's participation in literary culture.[50] Bede as an overwriter exerts considerable control over the narratives that he refashions, effectively writing out his female sources and authorities. In some respects his treatment of the saintly abbesses in Book IV can be likened to Boniface's decision not to reproduce Hildelith's account of the vision of the monk of Much Wenlock. However, the second example of monastic over-writing of female sanctity, discussed in more detail here, this time from the end of our period, is rather different. The late eleventh century saw a revival of monastic women's participation in literary culture, with the French-born hagiographer Goscelin of Saint-Bertin (*c.* 1035 to *c.* 1107) playing a key role. Goscelin contributed to the collection of lives of the Anglo-Saxon female saints at Ely which, as is noted above, emphasized familial as well as spiritual connections between the women, creating a spiritual matrilineage.[51] If the

47 Goscelin, *Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, p. xiv.
48 Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, pp. 35–49.
49 *Ibid.*, p. 49.
50 Hollis, 'Wilton as a Centre of Learning', p. 307.
51 See also Goscelin's treatment of female succession in his *translatio* of Mildrith, discussed by Hollis in 'Minster-in-Thanet Foundation Story', p. 57.

relations between women in this matrilineage are represented as competitive, as Ridyard suggests, Goscelin nevertheless emphasizes the extent to which the women also foster holiness in one another. Thus in his *Vita sancte Werbvrge* we are told that Wæburh's mother Eormenhild encouraged her young daughter to enter at a very early age the monastic life from which she herself had hitherto been excluded by marriage.[52] The Ely Lives, and Goscelin's work generally, can be seen as part of a larger project of Norman promotion, even appropriation, of Anglo-Saxon saints.[53] More significantly, however, from the perspective of women's literary history, Goscelin also produced a number of works for women, including Lives and other texts relating to Æthelburh and her successors at Barking for the nuns there in support of the decision made by Abbess Alviva (Ælfgivu) (d. 1080), in the face of ecclesiastical opposition, to translate the bodies of her predecessors to a larger shrine.[54] Included within these texts is a biography of Alviva herself.[55] Similarly, the legend of Edith (Eadgyth) was written for the house at Wilton 'to provide this cult with archiepiscopal validation'.[56] Goscelin's *Liber confortatorius*, mentioned above, was a work of instruction written for Eve (*c.* 1058–1120), a nun educated at Wilton, who left to become an anchoress at Saint-Laurent du Tertre in Angers.[57] Goscelin as an overwriter was concerned with updating and preserving traditions of female sanctity and paid more attention than Bede to the memories, words and even literary activities of devout women. Strikingly, Goscelin records, in his *vita* of Edith of Wilton (*c.* 961–84), daughter of Abbess Wulfthryth (d. *c.* 1000), that a book of devotional material, including chants and collects, written in Edith's own hand, was preserved in Wilton as an object of veneration.[58] Hollis suggests that a prayer included by Goscelin in his *Liber confortatorius* may have been composed by Edith, and taken from this same volume, although it is not attributed to her.[59] Goscelin clearly sees Edith's learning as evidence of her piety. Throughout, he emphasizes the role of Edith's mother Wulfthryth as her mentor and teacher: 'Ita colligitur in ecclesie gremium, in uirginale collegium, in diuinum gymnasium, in scolas uirtutum,

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52 Goscelin, *Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, pp. 34–5.
53 See Ridyard, '*Condigna veneratio*'; and Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, pp. 220–39, esp. 223.
54 Goscelin, 'Texts of Jocelyn of Canterbury'; Hayward, 'Translation-Narratives', pp. 81–3; Whalen, 'Patronage Engendered', pp. 129–30.
55 Goscelin, 'Texts of Jocelyn of Canterbury', pp. 437–8.
56 Hayward, 'Translation-Narratives', p. 77.
57 See Whalen, 'Patronage Engendered', pp. 124–9; and O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Edith's Choice'.
58 Goscelin, 'Légende de Ste Édith', pp. 55–6 (trans. 'Goscelin's Legend of Edith', p. 34).
59 Hollis, 'Wilton as a Centre of Learning', p. 310 and note 16. See Goscelin, 'Liber confortatorius of Goscelin', p. 106 (trans. 'Goscelin's *Liber confortatorius*', p. 194).

in eiusdem et spiritualis et carnalis genitricis sinum' [So she was gathered into the bosom of the Church, the college of virgins, the divine training school, the schools of virtue, into the bosom of her who was at the same time her spiritual and natural mother].[60] In one version of Edith's life it is recorded that she read saints' Lives intensively and emulated her aunt Edith of Tamworth and grandmother Ælfgifu of Shaftesbury.[61] Nevertheless, it remains the case that even as Goscelin recognizes the need to preserve the memory of Edith's prayers and learning, he does not, in her *vita* at least, see the need to preserve the contents of her book of devotions.

What is equally remarkable about his Lives, however, is that, unlike Bede, Goscelin embraced his female sources, drawing on the oral testimony of the nuns at Wilton, who

> inter reliqua que ipse oculis conspexere, affirmant confidenter cum aliis idoneis testibus ea que ab his uenerabilibus matribus audiere, qui ipsam sanctam uirginem et uidere, et deuotissime sunt obsequute; quarum et parentele et religiose uite non minorem fidem quam libris noscuntur habere.

> [as well as the things which they saw with their own eyes, declare confidently, with other appropriate evidence, those things which they heard from the venerable senior nuns, who both saw the holy virgin herself and devotedly obeyed her; whose high birth and religious lives are recognized as being equal in credibility to books.][62]

His *translatio* includes visionary accounts comparable to those recorded by Bede in Book IV of *Historia ecclesiastica*, such as one experienced after the death of Edith's mother Wulfthryth by a grieving nun.[63] Similarly, in his account of Æthelburh's posthumous protection of Barking, Goscelin famously cites the recollections of a nun of Barking:

> Sanctimonialis eiusdem monasterii editua fide predicanda Iudith cognominata, quae ad huius regis durauit tempora, ab his ducibus quibus gesta sunt se audisse asserebat sequentia miracula, quorum proximae adhuc supersunt testes in hac ipsa eclesia.

> [The nun named Judith, who was sacristan of this monastery and whose faith was eloquent, who lived into the times of this present king, claims to have

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60 Goscelin, 'Légende de Ste Édith', p. 47 (trans. 'Goscelin's Legend of Edith', pp. 30–1).
61 *Ibid.*, pp. 53–5 (trans. 'Goscelin's Legend of Edith', p. 35, note 50); Hollis, 'Wilton as a Centre of Learning', p. 310, and 'Goscelin's Writings', p. 239.
62 Goscelin, 'Légende de Ste Édith', p. 37 (trans. 'Goscelin's Legend of Edith', p. 24).
63 *Ibid.*, pp. 275–6 (trans. 'Translatio of Edith', pp. 75–6); Hollis, 'Strategies of Emplacement', pp. 155–9.

heard of the following miracles from the ealdormen by whom they were performed, and the closest witnesses survive to this day in this very church.][64]

Judith is no mere witness, however, but an active participant in events. Subsequently, in his description of the translation of Abbess Wulfhild (d. *c.* 1000), who had refounded Barking in around 970, Goscelin records that Wulfhild appeared to an anonymous nun in a vision, instructing her that when the tomb was opened, the nun should cover her body with her habit. Judith, on hearing of the vision, begged to be allowed to carry out Wulfhild's request, and when the tomb was opened, 'Quam sola Iudith fidelissima ausa contingere cognouit solidum corpus mira integritate' [Judith, the most devout, alone dared to touch her and knew that the body was marvellously sound and whole].[65] Judith herself overwrites the anonymous nun's vision by claiming for herself the performance of the dead saint's request.

How should we understand the significantly different attitudes to women as writers, educators and authorities in Bede and Goscelin? It is certainly not the case that women's engagement with literary culture steadily increased. Even following the ninth-century Viking attacks and the tenth-century Benedictine Reform, Hollis argues, the hiatus in women's engagement in literary culture continued from the tenth century until after the Norman invasion. She contends that, Goscelin aside, in contrast to the situation before the tenth century, 'there are no known Latin works written either for or by monastic women in the late Anglo-Saxon period *as it is usually defined*' (Hollis's emphasis).[66] Stricter rules of enclosure must have restricted the access religious women had to wider textual and scholarly communities, and thus limited their engagement with literary culture. Against this, the *Passio sancti Eadwardi*, or *Passion of St Edward* (a work influenced by Goscelin), was, as Paul Antony Hayward points out, quite possibly written by a nun of Shaftesbury for her convent in the late eleventh century.[67] Furthermore, there is, as Hollis notes, evidence of works at this time being produced for non-monastic women. There is also evidence of female book ownership, especially, although not exclusively, among aristocratic and royal women, in the centuries immediately before and after the Conquest.[68] In addition to the works

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64 Goscelin, 'Texts of Jocelyn of Canterbury', p. 412 (trans. 'Lives of the Abbesses at Barking', p. 146).
65 *Ibid.*, p. 432 (trans. 'Lives of the Abbesses at Barking', p. 149).
66 Hollis *et al.* (eds.), *Writing the Wilton Women*, p. 7; and see Hollis, 'Wilton as a Centre of Learning', pp. 307–8.
67 Fell (ed.), *Edward King and Martyr*; Hayward, 'Translation-Narratives', p. 85.
68 Hollis, 'Wilton as a Centre of Learning', pp. 308–9.

produced for the pre-Conquest queens Emma and Edith, Matilda (1080–1118), wife of Henry I, commissioned a Life of her mother St Margaret of Scotland (d. 1093).[69] It is important to locate Goscelin's hagiographies within this wider context of female patronage and engagement with literary culture: as we have seen, he too was commissioned to write *for* and *by* women, and thus he produced works updating pre-existing narratives of female sanctity, and tailored them for his female monastic audience. Whereas Bede was not answerable to the nuns at Whitby, Barking and Ely, Goscelin's histories of Barking and Wilton were designed to meet the needs of the sisters in those houses. While it is interesting to speculate as to why the nuns at Barking and Wilton did not produce their own histories – was it simply the case that the employment of a renowned hagiographer seemed more appropriate to women of their high social standing? – Goscelin's Lives nevertheless provide evidence that these women were both learned and literary. Furthermore, the existence of a text like the Shaftesbury *Passio sancti Eadwardi* may even indicate that Goscelin's works introduced a new phase in early medieval women's writing and engagement with literary culture in England that would reach its apex in the French women-authored hagiographies of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In touch with the past: Christina of Markyate

The example of Christina of Markyate illustrates very clearly the complexity of women's engagements with literary culture at the end of the early medieval period, while at the same time it somewhat problematizes the picture of women's literary and spiritual history that has emerged so far, dominated successively as it is by powerful abbesses and queens. Christina (formerly Theodora) of Markyate was born some thirty years after the Conquest. Her father, Autti, was a wealthy Anglo-Saxon, who at one point presided over the Gild Merchants of Huntingdon. Her mother, Beatrix, judging from her name, may have been French. From her earliest years, Christina had a strong attachment to St Albans Abbey. As a young child, Christina determined to dedicate herself to God, but this decision was met with fierce opposition from her parents, and she was persuaded, very much against her will, to marry. Christina fled from her family and into hiding, living for many years as a recluse. Eventually she was released from her marriage, and, having gained the patronage of Geoffrey, abbot of St Albans, she took her vows in *c.* 1131.

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69 Huneycutt, 'Idea of the Perfect Princess'.

Having gathered a community of followers around her, she became founding prioress of Markyate in 1145. Christina does not offer an elite model of female sanctity in the way that Hild, Æthelthryth, Æthelburh and their successors do; nor indeed was she canonized, although she was evidently revered as a holy woman by her supporters and followers. Nevertheless, she was certainly privileged. Hollis and Wogan-Browne suggest that 'had Christina not been perceived as pre-eminently marriageable', her parents might have 'even set up a small foundation for her, of which she might expect to become the prioress'.[70] As it was, Christina lived for many years outside the convent, initially with the female recluse Alfwen, then with the revered hermit Roger of St Albans (d. *c.* 1122), and subsequently with a small group of women. As Sarah Foot has argued, this form of non-monastic female piety is particularly characteristic of the late Anglo-Saxon Church, and a devout woman such as Christina would have been described as a *nunne* rather than a *mynecenu* [cloistered woman].[71]

Christina's first language was English, as we are reminded by the incomplete *Life of Christina of Markyate*, written by an anonymous monk of St Albans, which records that her spiritual guide Roger addressed her as 'myn sunendaege dohter' [my Sunday daughter].[72] Following her profession, Christina may well have begun a programme of education to improve her literacy,[73] but as Hollis and Wogan-Browne point out, 'Christina's world must have already been aurally trilingual even before she acquired a reading knowledge of written French or Latin'.[74] Certainly, long before her profession, Christina's devotional practices centred on reading and reciting or singing the Psalms (*Life*, pp. 92–3, 98–9). It is not clear whether she could also write. However, Christina's own chosen forms of cultural expression were weaving, sewing and embroidery (see, for example, *Life*, pp. 160–3). This is not unusual among pious women. Goscelin's *vita* of Edith, for example, records her skills in embroidery.[75] Furthermore, needlework would have been a form of artistry that was not restricted to the aristocracy. However, what sets Christina apart from other holy women of the late Middle Ages is that she is, famously, associated with two important books that have survived to the present day:

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70 Hollis and Wogan-Browne, 'St Albans and Women's Monasticism', pp. 35–6.
71 Foot, *Veiled Women*, pp. 104–10.
72 Talbot (ed. and trans.), *Life of Christina of Markyate*, pp. 106–7. All in-text references are to this edition.
73 Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing*, p. 22 and, for a more detailed discussion of Christina's engagement with literary culture and cultural production, pp. 19–38.
74 Hollis and Wogan-Browne, 'St Albans and Women's Monasticism', p. 26.
75 Goscelin, 'Légende de Ste Édith', pp. 69, 79 (trans. 'Goscelin's Legend of Edith', pp. 38, 48).

the beautifully illustrated St Albans Psalter, which was produced or adapted for Christina and her fellow nuns,[76] and the unfinished *Life of Christina of Markyate* (a copy of which was at one time in the possession of Markyate Priory). While both these books seem to have been commissioned by Geoffrey of St Albans, it is noteworthy that Christina's sister Margaret, who joined the growing community of recluses around Christina at Markyate, and subsequently entered the priory, may have contributed to them. Certainly she is recorded as having believed that Christina's visions ought to be remembered in posterity (*Life*, pp. 154–5) and she may well have provided information to Christina's biographer. Furthermore, Margaret seems to have been responsible for adding family obits to the calendar of the St Albans Psalter, including Christina's own obit. Christina's contribution to the Psalter may have been fabric curtains, which at one stage were sewn into the manuscript to protect some of the illustrations.

The textual traces of Christina's life provide a wealth of evidence that she modelled herself on Anglo-Saxon exemplars of piety, and on women saints in particular.[77] The names of three Anglo-Saxon women saints appear in the calendar of the St Albans Psalter: Hild, Æthelthryth of Ely and Frithuswith (Frideswide), founding abbess of Oxford (d. 727). Many aspects of the Psalter reveal that it was tailored specifically for Christina and her nuns: for example, great emphasis is placed in the illustrations on the roles of women.[78] The Anglo-Saxon saints in the calendar seem to have been quite deliberately chosen as early founding abbesses and mothers of the English Church. Æthelthryth of Ely, as we have seen, was twice married before she became a nun, and Frithuswith of Oxford withstood pressure to marry in order to fulfil her vow to Christ, and also had to escape her suitor and live as a hermit. Within *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, specific parallels are drawn with the example of another, in this case Roman, female saint. In a highly charged scene, Christina tries to persuade her husband Burthred to agree to a chaste marriage by telling him about the exemplary partnership of St Cecilia and her husband Valerian (*Life*, pp. 50–1). It is interesting to speculate about how Christina might have encountered these, and other, saints' histories. She would have been familiar with hagiographies written in her mother tongue. The earliest surviving accounts of Frithuswith's legend – including that recorded by William of Malmesbury – are in Latin and date to the early

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76 See online edition at www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter.

77 Hollis and Wogan-Browne, 'St Albans and Women's Monasticism'; Horner, *Discourse of Enclosure*, pp. 173–85.

78 Geddes, 'St Albans Psalter', pp. 204–5.

twelfth century, but it is possible that earlier vernacular versions existed.[79] As for Hild and Æthelthryth, an Old English version of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* was in circulation in the tenth and eleventh centuries.[80] Furthermore, the vernacular Lives of Æthelthryth and Cecilia were among those written by Ælfric of Eynsham (*c.* 955 to *c.* 1010), which were still in circulation in Christina's lifetime. Ælfric did not claim to write the Lives specifically for women (they are dedicated to two noble male patrons, the father and son Æthelweard and Æthelmær), but he clearly envisaged them being read by devout individuals like Christina.[81]

However, there is also reason to think that Christina might have encountered some of her models of sanctity through the post-Conquest overwritings of the Insular saints' Lives. Significantly, Christina's patron, Geoffrey of St Albans, was an associate of Osbert of Clare.[82] Osbert of Clare was English born, but probably of Norman-French parentage. In his letter to Adelidis of Barking, written when he was prior of Westminster, he summarizes events from the life of Æthelthryth,[83] and also discusses in detail Æthelburh of Barking's ascension to heaven.[84] In his conclusion to the latter account, he directs the interested reader to read Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* for herself.[85] Osbert also cites St Cecilia as an ideal of virginity, praising her achievements thus:

> haec sunt praedicanda insigniter illius admirabilis feminae opera, quae femineam mentem non aspirant, sed virilem constantiam in illius redolent libertate.

> [These are the outstanding works of evangelizing by this wonderful woman; they do not express a woman's mind but in the privileged position of her burial reflect masculine firmness.][86]

In her *Life*, Christina is, on a number of occasions, described as transcending her sex, notably on the occasion of her flight from her family, when she is reported to have encouraged herself with the words 'Quid sexum feminei vereris? Virilem animum indue' [pp. 92–3; Why do you respect your feminine sex? Put on manly courage]. Texts such as Goscelin's *vita* of Edith also resonate with Christina's *Life*. Hollis and Wogan-Browne point out, for

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79 J. Blair, 'Saint Frideswide Reconsidered'.
80 Miller (ed. and trans.), *Old English Bede*.
81 Ælfric, *Lives of Saints*, vol. i, pp. 1–2.
82 Hollis and Wogan-Browne, 'St Albans and Women's Monasticism', p. 42.
83 Osbert, *Letters*, pp. 156–7 (trans. 'Osbert of Clare to Adelidis', pp. 24–6).
84 *Ibid.*, pp. 175–7 (trans. 'Osbert of Clare to Adelidis', pp. 46–8).
85 *Ibid.*, p. 177 (trans. 'Osbert of Clare to Adelidis', p. 48).
86 *Ibid.*, p. 156 (trans. 'Osbert of Clare to Adelidis', p. 24).

example, that Goscelin's representation of the spiritual friendship of Edith and Bishop Dunstan, which is likened to that between the Virgin Mary and John the Apostle, is mirrored in Christina's vision of the Crucifixion, in which Christina is Mary and Geoffrey of St Albans is John.[87] Both narratives, furthermore, open with natal visions. At the time of Edith's birth, Goscelin recounts, a ray of light shone from the baby's head as she cried out for the first time.[88] Edith's mother Wulfthryth recognized the significance of what had happened and thereafter left her husband in order to join the monastery. Christina's own mother, Beatrix, experienced a miracle, in this case during her pregnancy, in which a white dove flew to her from the church and remained in her presence for seven days (Life, pp. 34–5). However, while the Life reveals that Beatrix realized the significance of what had occurred (and indeed she is named as the writer's authority), the subsequent narrative illustrates that she strongly and indeed violently resisted her daughter's spiritual path. Nevertheless, Christina's decision as a young child to dedicate herself to God resonates with Edith's self-consecration aged only two.[89] Although these examples may indicate shared traditions of Anglo-Saxon sanctity rather than direct influence, it is nevertheless the case that such narratives must have been in wide circulation, whether in English or Latin. Yet whereas the over-writings of the lives of Anglo-Saxon saints by Goscelin and others can be seen as Norman appropriations, Christina's emulation of such models may be seen as Anglo-Saxon resistance.[90] Nevertheless, at least following her profession if not before, Christina also encountered non-Insular models of piety recorded in languages that were not her mother tongue. That Christina identified with, or was encouraged by Geoffrey of St Albans to identify with, alternative French traditions of sanctity is most forcefully indicated by the inclusion within the St Albans Psalter of the Chanson d'Alexis, which focuses on a man who fled marriage to live an ascetic and eremitic life, and also on the bride with whom Alexis is eventually reconciled in heaven.[91]

Beyond those texts directly referred to or included in her books (the Lives of St Cecilia and Alexis), it is impossible to know whether Christina had read the work of Bede, Ælfric, Osbert or Goscelin – the line of proven descent has died out. The influence of earlier saints should not be understood in

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87 Hollis and Wogan-Browne, 'St Albans and Women's Monasticism', pp. 33–4.
88 Goscelin, 'Légende de Ste Édith', p. 42 (trans. 'Goscelin's Legend of Edith', p. 27); see O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Edith's Choice', pp. 256–7.
89 Goscelin, 'Légende de Ste Édith', p. 44 (trans. 'Goscelin's Legend of Edith', p. 29); see O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Edith's Choice'.
90 See Hayward, 'Translation-Narratives'.
91 See Emma Campbell, 'Clerks and Laity', pp. 219–23.

genealogical terms but as a touch across time. Furthermore, Christina is not simply a Cecilia or an Alexis, a Hild, an Aethelthryth, a Frithuswith or an Edith. It is clear that, with the help of her spiritual advisors, her followers, her supporters and her biographer, she too overwrites – adapts and revises – these models of female sanctity.

Conclusion

The historiography of female sanctity establishes strong connections between the early Anglo-Saxon period and the later Middle Ages, but it is not a continuous history. While pieces or traces remain of Anglo-Saxon women's writing, much has been destroyed or has been heavily overwritten. The hiatus in works associated with women from the ninth century until after the Conquest indicates that women's literary history in the early medieval period, especially the literary history associated with the female monasteries, does not follow a straightforward trajectory. Nevertheless, that the women's houses at Wilton and Barking were still, by the late Anglo-Saxon period, centres of literary culture is indicated in the writings of Goscelin and Osbert of Clare, although, as the example of Christina of Markyate illustrates so vividly, women's engagement with literary culture was not limited to such centres. Yet, aside from anonymous texts such as *Passio sancti Eadwardi*, or the lost work of Muriel of Wilton, it is not until the second half of the twelfth century that we find more extensive evidence of women's participation in literary culture that extended far beyond patronage and reading. The late twelfth century introduced a new phase in women's literary history: we might even think of this as the *Barking renaissance*, because of the central role played by the abbey. In addition to the works of Marie de France (who may have been a royal abbess, according to some critical opinion), three Anglo-Norman saints' Lives have survived from this period which are known to be authored by women: a life of Edward the Confessor by an anonymous nun of Barking (the so-called 'nun of Barking'); the *Life of St Catherine* by Clemence of Barking (*fl.* 1166 to *c.* 1200); and the life of St Audrey (Æthelthryth) written by another Marie, possibly of Chatteris Abbey in Cambridgeshire.[92] All three writers bring their own creativity to bear on their translations, and in each Life there is a strong sense of a female voice, whether that be through their female subjects in the case of the Lives of Audrey and Catherine, or – in the case of the Life of Edward – through Queen Edith, the wife of the saintly subject. Here

92 Wogan-Browne, 'Clerc u lai', and *Saints' Lives*, pp. 207–12, 227–45, 249–56.

overwriting is a useful metaphor for translation, as it indicates some of the originality inherent in updating a work for a new audience, or a new purpose. Indeed, Clemence of Barking explicitly reflects upon the inadequacy of her source:

> Ele fud jadis translaté
> Sulunc le tens bien ordené;
> Mais ne furent dunc si veisdus
> Les humes, ne si envius
> Cum il sunt al tens ki est ore
> E aprés nus serrunt uncore.
> Pur ço que li tens est mué
> E des humes la qualité
> Est la rime vil tenue
> Car ele est asquans corrumpue.
> Pur ço si l'estuet amender
> E le tens selunc la gent user.

[It was translated before and well set out according to the standards of the time. But people then were not so hard to please or so critical as they are in our day, and will be even more so after we are gone. Because times and men's quality have changed, the poem is held in low esteem, for it is somewhat defective in places. So it is necessary to correct it and make the times conform to the people.][93]

While the nuns of Barking may have outsourced the rewriting of their own history in the previous century, the pressure to update and refashion the narrative of this legendary woman, who evidently gave so many nuns and laywomen a model of learned piety, provided sufficient impetus for Clemence to rewrite the story for her sisters and other religious women. The *Life of St Catherine* – rewritten to 'make the times conform to the people' – thus offers an appropriate end-point for this study of female sanctity and the relics of women's writing in the early Middle Ages.

93 Clemence, *Life of St Catherine*, lines 35–46 (trans. 'Life of St Catherine', p. 3).

Saintly lives: friendship, kinship, gender and sexuality

L. M. C. WESTON

Even after the withdrawal of (Christian) Roman imperial control, Britain – or at least Celtic Britain – continued to play its part in the definition of sanctity in the late antique world. The story of Anglo-Saxon Christianity, however, is more complicated. To say that Christianity disappeared completely during and after the Anglo-Saxon Settlement period may be too simplistic: the later turf battles between Augustine's missionaries to Kent and the British and Frankish Church leaders already resident in England suggest otherwise. But it is fair to say that Christianity lost its hold on the royal dynasties of the nascent Anglo-Saxon kingdoms until Augustine's mission introduced Roman Christianity to Kent, to Northumbria and eventually to the rest of England.[1] That restoration, fostering the veneration first of universal saints and then of new Anglo-Saxon saints, made the cult of the saints fundamental to life in early medieval England.

Having (re)gained a foothold in England, Christianity and the cult of the saints began to shape the most basic aspects of economic and social as well as ritual life. Remnants of pre-Christian belief in the sacral power of royal dynasties, as much as the cures and miracles, visions and prophecies, elevated many a founder of a royal monastic foundation to veneration as a saint.[2] The relationship between patron saint and devotee was often one of friendship or kinship: as members of various Anglo-Saxon dynasties became saints, members of elite groups became related to saints. Even where the link was to a non-local saint – to an Apostle or Roman martyr – the bonds of patronage could be defined in traditional terms of kinship and lordship: within Anglo-Saxon elite groups the two relationships blurred. St Gregory the Great, for instance,

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1 See Lambert, *Christians and Pagans*; and Brooks, 'From British to English Christianity'.
2 Thacker and Sharpe (eds.), *Local Saints and Local Churches*. See esp. Thacker, 'Making of a Local Saint'; Crook, 'Enshrinement of Local Saints'; Cubitt, 'Universal Saints'; and J. Blair, 'Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Saints'.

despite never having himself set foot in England, nevertheless acquired the reputation of being apostle to the English. In Anglo-Saxon legend his interest in England (more specifically Northumbria) was prompted by his encounter with Anglian slaves in a Roman market.[3] Gregory is thus an example of a saint both universal and local to England.

The creation of native English saints especially affected the localization of sanctity, the becoming sacred of places near at hand as well as in Rome or the Holy Land.[4] Gregory advised his missionaries to facilitate the evangelization of the English by accommodating pre-Christian sites and festivals. Such a 'conversion' of the landscape often entailed its (re)sacralization through the 'placing' of saints, the association of saints, their miracles or their shrines with specific locations. For example, Oswald's heroic life and quasi-martyr's death in battle made him a saint, even though his martial campaigns were motivated as much by politics as by religion. Bede cites extensive oral testimony about the efficacy of his relics and the miracles taking place at the site of his death in his *Ecclesiastical History* (II.9–13). In these narratives, folktales vie with literary narrative conventions and popular beliefs with clerical understandings of sanctity and sacred power active in daily life. Monasteries founded by saints, churches dedicated to them, and altars and shrines housing their relics all reify the continuing powerful presence of saints within Christian communities, and as in space, so also in time. In the liturgical year the *sanctorale*, the yearly round of fixed days devoted to the memory of saints, was interwoven with the *temporale*, the sequence of fixed and moveable celebrations of the life of Christ and His Church. Consequently seasonal activities (like the slaughtering of cattle in preparation for the coming winter) could become identified with the saint's day around which they occurred (Martinmas), even as traditional pre-Christian folk festivals (like that which would become All Hallows) could be appropriated for the Christian calendar.

The most basic textual reflexes of the cult of saints both local and universal appear in calendars that locate among the saints' feast days of the liturgical year the obits and commemorations of a monastic community's own holy dead and secular elite supporters. Metrical calendars bridge the divide between the strictly practical and the literary in both Latin and Old English, as do martyrologies and menologies, which supplement calendar lists with brief hagiographical notes, especially the date and place of martyrdoms. Old

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3 The incident, which does not appear in any continental version of Gregory's *vita*, appears in *HE*, II.1 and in an anonymous *Life of St Gregory* from Whitby.
4 J. Howe, 'Creating Symbolic Landscapes'; Markus, 'How on Earth Could Places Become Holy?'

English texts like the *Secgan be þam Godes sanctum þe on Engla Lande ærost reston* inscribe a sacred topography.[5] The Old English poetic *Menologium*, prefacing one manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sets the earthly history of the Chronicle entries within the recurrent cycles of spiritual chronology.[6] The composition of Anglo-Latin poetic *tituli* (inscriptions originally intended for altars and shrines) further challenges modern distinctions between the utilitarian and the aesthetic. As engraved or painted within a church, they made manifest the rise of Christian literacy as a new form of cultural power within a traditionally oral society. They enjoyed an additional kind of readership and reception, however, when gathered and revised in manuscript form: Aldhelm's intricate and elaborate *tituli* became models for later writers of Anglo-Latin.

The most 'literary' textual reflexes of saintly life, however, are represented by the genre of hagiographic narratives that can be grouped generally under the heading of saints' Lives – *vitae sancti* – but embracing the subgenre of *passiones* focusing more specifically on a martyr's death. Among these, primary narratives draw upon the personal knowledge of witnesses, often named, to make a case for their subject's sanctity. In secondary narratives, by contrast, sanctity is taken as a given, although both may draw upon a community's oral traditions, even as they invoke literary models. A more useful distinction divides those written for liturgical or paraliturgical use – for reading in community, either as part of a service or in monastic chapter – from extraliturgical or 'art *vitae*' which may show the influence of other genres or modes of thought and may work through more complex instances of iconography, figuration and typology.[7] Widely circulated Lives, such as those of St Martin and St Anthony, provided models both for later Christians in their performance of saintly life and for hagiographic narratives. In Anglo-Saxon monastic foundations ruled according to Frankish traditions and disciplines (a category that included many if not most of those double houses under the control of an abbess) the Life of Columbanus was also influential and imitated, especially in its emphasis on vision and miracles of light. Although *vitae* could circulate alone, in small volumes, or *libelli*, they often circulated as part of a legendary, an anthology of saints' Lives usually but not always arranged in the calendrical order of their feast days. They could also be grouped thematically, after the model of Gregory's *Dialogues*, perhaps the most influential Latin collection of visions and miracle stories.

5 Rollason, 'Lists of Saints' Resting Places'.
6 Head, 'Perpetual History'.
7 T. D. Hill, '*Imago Dei*', p. 38.

Beginning in the eighth century, England witnessed a blossoming of Latin *vitae* of English saints based on these models: Lives were composed, for example, for kings like Oswald and Edmund, hermits like Cuthbert and Guthlac, missionary bishops like Wilfrid and Boniface. Many saints' Lives became part of the historical narrative of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. Over time the lives of many saints both universal and local were translated from Latin into Old English. Hagiographic narratives were also excerpted and revised for preaching. The tenth-century Blickling Homilies include five *vitae*, all of universal saints: the deaths of Saints Peter and Paul, the Miracles of St Martin, and a Life of St Andrew. In the Vercelli Book of roughly the same date, prose homilies, including ones based on the lives of St Martin and St Guthlac, are mingled with religious and philosophical poems, suggesting that the manuscript was intended for personal rather than communal liturgical use. Both the Vercelli Book and the Exeter Book include Old English verse narratives (including the works of Cynewulf and the Guthlac poems discussed below) that are even more obviously 'art *vitae*'.

A traffic in saints

Saints, their cults and the *vitae* thus constitute a vital part of the literary culture of Anglo-Saxon England.[8] In the hands of authors like Bede and Aldhelm, hagiography is an integral part of Anglo-Latin literature. Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* represents arguably the high point of Old English prose, while Cynewulf's works are mainstays of the Old English poetic canon. The textual economy within which these Anglo-Saxon hagiographers and their audiences exchanged saints' Lives engages directly with the construction of Christian identity in and against secular Anglo-Saxon social and cultural ideologies.

Speaking to discrepancies between possible definitions of sanctity, the models of both universal and native saints offered in Anglo-Saxon texts also reveal the way these discrepancies arise concurrently with cruxes in sexuality and gender. When Gregory answers Augustine of Canterbury's questions (as reported by Bede, *HE*, I.27), part of his advice pertains specifically to matters of kinship. Is it permissible for two brothers to marry two sisters, provided there be no blood ties between the families? To what degree may the faithful marry with their kindred? Is it lawful for a man to marry his stepmother or sister-in-law? This last question would prove especially crucial since such remarriage traditionally served to stabilize succession in often dynastically fraught earlier

8 Lapidge, 'Saintly Life'.

Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. As Augustine's questions suggest, constructions of gender and sexuality must be situated within contemporary kinship and family relations. Premodern identities – including gender and sexual identities – are not so much personal and individual as they are constructed in relation to community, and especially to kin-group. Marriage was a particularly significant practice of dynastic politics. Gender roles too were defined and disciplined with regard to the structures of kinship and marriage exchange and, within a kinship-based gender economy, legitimate – 'natural' – sexuality served the kin-group. Loyalty to the family entailed identification with its dynastic interests and adoption of its desire to reproduce and continue the line. Conversely, sexuality becomes transgressive in so far as it violates social contracts and the political stability based in the family; transgression is grounded in a conflict between individual sexual passion on the one hand and the claims of the larger family or dynastic unit on the other.

It is in this regard that the virginal body of the saint – especially but not exclusively the body of a female virgin – becomes a particularly potent site for a contest of representation. To whom do the virgin's body and the virgin's desires and/or sexuality belong? Who controls its signification and use? As reforms increased the number of prohibited degrees for marriage, and expanded incest to include spiritual as well as blood kinship, the restriction of elite family bloodlines particularly affected female sexuality.[9] Limiting marriages and containing female sexuality in particular could consolidate dynastic power by preventing the proliferation of marginally royal contenders. Female virginity and the claustration of women – both marriageable daughters and young, politically sensitive widows – could thus represent an alternative investment of family reproductive capital – or a betrayal of a family's secular survival.

Virginity has different meanings in secular contexts and in monastic ones. From a secular, dynastic point of view, Christian or more precisely monastic chastity may be as perverse (unless it is being co-opted to limit breeding and inheritance problems) as, from a monastic point of view, secular marriage and physical reproduction of children is hideously abject. In fact, the monastic point of view – and all of the texts to be discussed below inscribe some version of a monastic point of view – problematizes secular kinship, and thereby constructions of gender and sexuality, neither of which serves the human family through biological reproduction but rather the spiritual family through ideological reproduction. Within monasticism, literacy also facilitates a form

9 Bouchard, 'Consanguinity and Noble Marriages'.

of social reproduction. Saints' Lives as texts provide exemplars, that is, for both readers and writers: the writing of *vitae* that extends saintly paradigms beyond one generation of disciples also allows hagiographers to imitate and thereby establish affiliation with earlier writers. Even when (or perhaps especially when) translation is involved, emulation prompts both writers and readers to claim a kind of literary kinship with earlier authors as well as the saints they commemorate. Chaste monastic bodies are ultimately even more powerful when they become powerfully reproductive of new Christian bodies without sexual reproduction. Literacy, and especially the circulation of holy, chaste bodies in textual form, offers one more very powerful form of monastic reproduction.

Within the Lives of virgin martyrs, for example, the spectacle of martyrdom converts others to Christianity – and often gathers them into communities of virgins, new spiritual families. The saints effectively reproduce themselves explicitly in the actions narrated in their legends and dramas, and implicitly in the models they provide for their readers. If the martyrdom narrative seems incomplete without premortem evangelization and postmortem conversion of spectators, later Christians learn to be Christian not only by imitating the behaviours of the saints they read about, but also – perhaps more significantly – by engaging with the conflicting discourses of gender and sexuality in those texts and in the world in which they are read. A saintly or sanctified eloquence draws others to virtue through imitation and emulation, processes that often entail the rewriting or transformation of text into new text.

By looking at a range of exemplary Lives – Aldhelm's *Prosa de uirginitate*; the Latin and Old English prose and poetic versions of *Guthlac*; Cynewulf's poems, especially his *Juliana* and *Elene*; Ælfric's *Eugenia*; and the anonymous Old English *Euphrosyne* and *Mary of Egypt* – this chapter addresses the contests within as well as between hagiographical texts, contests played out over time and between languages, through reading and reception of native and translated forms of masculinity, femininity and transgender, and of sexualities and desires, and of virginity as both a gender and a sexual choice particularly constructed as saintly. It will seek, too, to contextualize anxieties and obsessions within the genre, and to theorize the role literacy and textual models play in constructing genders and in producing and disciplining sexualities.

Aldhelm: virginity and the trouble with gender

In both his *Prosa* and *Carmen de uirginitate* (*c*. 685) Aldhelm rewrites universal saints, at least in part, to develop (among other things) an Anglo-Saxon

virginity, and Anglo-Saxon (or rather more particularly Anglo-Latin) monastic masculinities and femininities. He dedicates the *Prosa* to Hildilith (of Barking) and to nine other women: Justina and Cuthburg, Osburg, Aldgith and Scholastica, Hidburg and Berngith, Eulalia and Thecla. All were most likely abbesses who, with Aldhelm, formed a geographically widespread community in southern England linked through the exchange of texts.[10] The later *Carmen* surely appeals to a similar audience, if not in this case one specifically named or gendered. Readership is not, of course, limited to those specific women, nor even to women only: a male reader – and the manuscript contexts of most of Aldhelm's extant texts suggest their reception in many male communities – would find value not only in their inclusion of male models but also in their exploration of the ideology of monastic virginity and its redefinitions of secular gender.

For Aldhelm the Anglo-Saxon virgin body is an unnatural body in need of constant reconstruction and discipline. The models he provides for its reshaping are drawn from multiple Latin sources and duplicate the history of Christianity from the Old Testament to the New, and on into the lives of universal saints of the early Church. Of the examples of perfect virginity, John the Evangelist particularly exemplifies virginity as the possibility of miraculous transformation not only of pebbles into gold and jewels but also of the human body 'contra creaturae ritum' [23.25–6; against the customary law of creation]. Free will, stimulated by divine inspiration revealed through the reading of Scripture and supported by communal discipline and prayer, has the power to reorganize sexuality and the gendered body. Every virgin, male or female, of whatever earthly lineage, assumes a new identity as a child of *Ecclesia*, the Church, fertilized 'casto verbi fecundat semine' [5.6–9; through the chaste seed of the Word]. In Aldhelm's prose text, the Church's spiritual fertility results, through the reading and imitation of texts, in the (re)production of virginity in other bodies. Aldhelm imagines his readers as her unnaturally natural children, 'adoptivas regenerantis gratiae filias ex fecundo ecclesiasticae conceptionis utero spiritalis verbi semine progenitas per maternam' [2.8–9; adoptive daughters of regenerative grace brought forth from the fecund womb of ecclesiastical conception through the seed of the spiritual Word].

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10 Aldhelm, *Prosa de uirginitate*, vol. I, pp. 47–53. All citations of Aldhelm's text are from this edition, vol. II, pp. 27–761, by chapter and line number. Translations are from Aldhelm, *Prose Works*, pp. 59–132.

Less allegorically, of course, the maternal responsibility for educating these children falls upon women like the abbesses to whom Aldhelm addresses his text most directly. The concept of spiritual maternity is constructed in opposition to physical maternity, but also by reference to historical bodies, Anglo-Saxon female bodies constructed during a period in which the advent of Christianity provoked many changes in kinship relations, and consequently in definitions of gender and legitimate sexuality.[11] Most of the women Aldhelm addresses are as likely to have been divorced or widowed as never to have married, and as likely to have borne children in the past as to be physically intact. For them Aldhelm's inclusion of chaste widowhood within the larger category of virgin has a special relevance. Likewise the questions the text poses about virginity. If virginity is not defined merely by the physical intactness of the hymen, can it be recovered, spiritually if not physically? And can virginity be lost spiritually, even if the hymen remains intact?

Anglo-Saxon names like Cuthburg, Osburg, Aldgith, Hidburg and Berngith proclaim (even somewhat proudly, perhaps) membership of specific high-status kin-groups. They name bodies gendered and positioned, probably from birth, as potential objects trafficked between aristocratic male subjects to forge alliances. Latinate Christian names like Justina, Scholastica, Eulalia and Thecla, on the other hand, would seem to identify women without kin in the secular world, although their non-Germanic names do find them 'ancestors' and histories within the prose text itself, where the stories of their saintly namesakes figure. As Aldhelm points out, most of these namesakes themselves find virginity the fragile prize of a struggle to reject the duties of earthly kinship, especially the propagation of the family line. Indeed, although sexual assault is more overt and literal in the lives of female virgins like Lucy and Agnes, both male and female virgins face and resist secular marriage as a form of institutionalized rape. Chrysanthus, for example, is imprisoned and starved by his father before being forced into marriage with Daria, the bride he subsequently converts to Christianity and virginity; Julian is similarly coerced into marrying, but subverts secular marriage by converting his bride, Basilissa, while Cecilia likewise converts both her husband and her brother-in-law. For them, secular marriage and dynastic reproduction must be enforced through violence.

Like the exemplary Paul the Hermit, then, Aldhelm's readers have rejected sexuality and embraced monastic exile 'qua carnalis spurcitiae blandimenta fatescunt' [28.14–20; where the attractions of carnal filth grow

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11 Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, esp. pp. 17–39; Pasternack, 'Negotiating Gender'.

faint]. Faint perhaps, but still there: temptation and apostasy are always threatening possibilities. A sexuality based in the dynastic concerns of kinship ties must be violently (if ultimately futilely) enforced, whereas virginity by contrast 'se angelicae castitatis comitem fore gratulatur' [17.6–8; rejoices at being a companion of angelic chastity]. Nevertheless the work of remaking oneself like an angel still requires no little struggle: 'futura angelicae vitae celsitudo ab illasae virginitatis sectatoribus ac sectatricibus' [18.1; the future eminence of the angelic life is now in a certain sense seized by violence beforehand by the male and female followers of intact virginity]. For human beings brought into this world through 'the natural womb', to choose virginity is 'spretis naturae legibus' [18.7–9; to spurn the laws of nature]. Becoming a virgin requires a radical reinscription of self against secular conceptions of nature.

Virginity entails, more exactly, a reorientation of gender and sexuality within an alternative monastic kinship with competing desires, performed within secular 'natural' bodies and spaces. It is therefore perhaps quite proper that the most unnaturally natural monastic virgin body in its most perfect – and perfectly androgynous, or ungendered – form exists only in or as a written text. Like bees, Aldhelm's readers advance out 'per florulenta scripturarum arva' [4.25–6; into the flowering fields of Scripture] and settle now upon the writings of prophets of the Old Testament, now upon the Gospels, now upon the commentaries of the Fathers of the Church. Literacy allows them to reproduce through a kind of textual parthenogenesis. Like bees they transmute the nectar of scriptural flowers to produce their progeny.

Yet even the most utopian, poetic images of community are fragile. A virgin like Eugenia may reject her 'natural' gender. She may cut off her long hair and 'coenubialis militiae tirocinium non muliebriter . . . contra iura naturae' [44.13–16; take service in the monastic army not like a woman, but against the laws of nature] as a man, and even safely join an otherwise all male community. Aldhelm may exhort the nuns reading her life to become like her, to transform themselves into (masculine) soldiers who do not turn their backs 'muliebriter' [11.30; effeminately] towards the enemy. Yet even that metaphor foregrounds the seeming inevitability of gender difference. While the monastic virgin, like the angel and the bee, may be theoretically beyond gender difference, in practice the text's 'double choir' of male and female exemplars, and the choirs of monks and nuns who read it, must still observe segregation by gender.

Guthlac: masculinity and the friendship of spiritual warriors

If Aldhelm's Anglo-Latin text offers his virgin martyrs as universal models for local readers to emulate, the various Latin and Old English prose and verse Lives of Guthlac offer a more complicated narrative of how such emulation plays out. The historical Guthlac was born *c.* 670, and died in his hermitage at Crowland, in the South Lincolnshire fens, in 714. Guthlac's early life overlaps with even as it echoes that of Æthelred of Mercia, king from 675 until his abdication and conversion to monastic life in 704. Outliving Guthlac by two years, Æthelred is one of the best-documented kings to 'opt out' of secular power upon their full conversion to Christianity.[12] Guthlac's career followed a similar path: a member of an elite Mercian family, after a youthful career as a warrior he became a monk at Repton (Derbyshire). The monastic environment there would have been very much like that which shaped the audience of Aldhelm's texts: under the rule of the Abbess Ælfthryth, Repton was a royal foundation, a centre for dynastic memory and intercessory prayer for the souls of the Mercian royal family. Guthlac did not remain within the community at Repton, however: he took up the even more difficult life of a hermit two years later, consecrating his oratory and cell at Crowland on the feast day of his spiritual patron, St Bartholomew. Ironically Guthlac's retirement at Crowland seems to have increased rather than severed his ties to the secular world. Gaining a reputation for his visions and wisdom, Guthlac had many important visitors, including the exiled Mercian king, Æthelbald.

Felix of Crowland composed the Latin *Life of St Guthlac* sometime before 749, at the request of King Ælfwald of East Anglia. Although it draws heavily upon the witness of Guthlac's friends and disciples, all in all Felix's *Vita Guthlaci* situates itself as well as its subject within both international Latin literary culture and the specifically Anglo-Latin culture of the day. Felix's Latin is sometimes ornate and elaborately literary, showing the stylistic influence of Aldhelm. His depiction of Guthlac's cohabitation with sometimes mischievous ravens and swallows echoes the career of an earlier English hermit, Cuthbert, memorialized by Bede. Even more marked is the influence of the *Life of St Anthony* as a blueprint for this and other, later native hermit saints in an Anglo-Saxon wilderness. The many images of light and the choir of angelic voices that attends Guthlac's death scene, as well as his incorrupt body, also recall the *vita* of Columbanus. Guthlac's visions and spirit journeys, moreover,

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12 Stancliffe, 'Kings Who Opted Out'.

recall other visions going back to those narrated in Gregory's *Dialogues*. Guthlac's visionary credentials echo the wider genre of the visionary (especially the eschatological visionary) in eighth-century England.[13]

In the *vita*, Guthlac's career as a spiritual warrior against the devil conflates the warrior archetypes of the Latinate *miles Christi* with the traditional gender and behaviour models of the aristocratic Anglo-Saxon world, at least as idealized in literature. As a young man Guthlac had his warrior companions: his identity was based in those secular relationships or friendships and, less explicitly, in his duties to his elite kin-group and king. His monastic conversion entails rejection of wealth and prestige, of kin and soldier companions, for monastic poverty and humility, and for new kinsmen and friends including his saintly patron Bartholomew, and Beccel, his last disciple and the primary witness to his life and holy death. The three of them, Bartholomew, Guthlac and Beccel, implicitly play out an exemplary monastic ideological reproduction through imitation.

According to the *vita*, at Repton Guthlac is obedient to all provisions of the strict monastic rule, learning humility from his fellow monks but eventually surpassing them in emulation of both earlier martyrs and the Scriptures. His life of penance and discipline significantly includes total abstention from alcohol, a full rejection of the behaviours of the aristocratic secular mead hall. His search for a fuller monastic conversion leads him to a wilderness in a landscape that is explicitly that of a boundary place. Between Mercia and East Anglia, it is between land and water, between this world and the next.[14] It is a place both uninhabited and overpopulated, a place haunted by the past. Its demon inhabitants speak a Celtic language, a reminder of Guthlac's own past: he understands a little of what they say from his past as a Mercian warrior. It is a place of exile and damnation, but one destined to be transformed into a blessed home, its accursed exiled spirits with their ties to the past replaced by the future choir of Crowland's monks.

In this place Guthlac undergoes a variety of trials: in visionary encounters with spirits he is thrown into the fen, taken up into the heavens, given a glimpse of hell. Despite the strictness of his life as a hermit, the devils (ironically) use the examples of Moses, Elijah and the Desert Fathers in order to tempt him into immoderate fasting and privation. On his island Guthlac forges a new identity, taking up the shield of faith and helmet of purity, wielding the arrows of holy psalms against opponents who externalize his older, secular self. He is finally rescued by Bartholomew, who offers Guthlac his support and

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13 Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday*.
14 Wickham-Crowley, 'Living on the *Ecg*'.

friendship. The newly recreated net of friendship then extends to include, significantly, the younger Beccel, who fulfils a kinsman's role of overseeing the saint's burial and carrying Guthlac's last words to his sister Pega.

Sometime after the eighth century the Latin Life was translated into Old English. Indeed, Guthlac's textual Life is as contested as his life, caught between secular and monastic identities, and repeatedly re-received and rewritten in Old English prose and verse. Each translation foregrounds subtly different aspects of Guthlac's sanctity and his hybrid warrior/hermit masculinity. The original translation into Guthlac's own Mercian dialect is no longer extant; its subsequent rendering into West Saxon, however, appears in a later eleventh-century manuscript, London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian D. xxi. Following its Latin source closely in plot and larger thematic content, the Old English prose translation is markedly less complex in syntax and style. It omits especially those flourishes that involve allusions to other Anglo-Latin texts.[15] A second partial translation appears as one of the homilies of the later tenth-century Vercelli Book. A revision of sections 4 and 5 of the Old English text – probably the original Mercian translation or something like it – and equivalent to chapters 28 to 32 of Felix's Latin text, the homily offers Guthlac's temptations, his life as hermit, and his visions of devils, as a meditation on holy living.[16]

The two poems conjoined as *Guthlac A* and *B* in the late tenth-century Exeter Book show greater variance from the Latin *vita*. Of the two, *Guthlac B* is the more dependent on Felix's narrative. Its preface begins by invoking Eden before the Fall and a primal Adam – not yet Adam and Eve – figuratively 'leomu lic somud ond lifes gæst' [838; the human body and soul] united in one identity in prelapsarian purity.[17] The original unity fails as Adam and Eve consume 'þone bitran drync' [868b; the bitter drink] of death and exile. 'Us secgað bec' [878b; books tell us], the poem continues, about saints like Guthlac who obey God's will, reverse the exile of the Fall, and ultimately make the journey to heaven – and who through the books that record their lives teach Christians to do the same. The poem then turns specifically to Guthlac's miracles and his struggle as 'godes cempan' [889b; a soldier of God] against troops of warlike spirits. Mostly, however, it focuses on the saint's holy death.

Neither Guthlac's disciple Beccel nor his sister Pega is named in the poem. Their relationships to the saint – as friend and as kinswoman – are

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15 Whatley, 'Lost in Translation'.
16 J. Roberts, 'Old English Prose Translation'.
17 Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*, vol. 1, pp. 140–59.

nevertheless very much at issue. The poem progresses through a series of conversations between Guthlac and his disciple, forming a final deathbed colloquy of sorts that figures Guthlac as a warrior alternately going into battle and setting forth on his journey to his heavenly home. Most significant in this colloquy, however, is the poem's exploration of spiritual friendship and the way it both is and is not like secular friendship and kinship, and how the separation of friends offers the fullest test of friendship.[18] To Beccel, Guthlac is 'winedryhten min' [beloved lord], 'fæder' [father] and 'freonda hleo' [refuge of friends] in lines 1011b–12; he is a 'freodryhten' [1021; noble lord]. Their relationship uses the traditional vocabulary of secular friendship and kinship. To Guthlac, Beccel is a 'leofe bearn', a 'swæse bearn' [1076b, 1166b; beloved son]; and the saint urges his 'leofest manna' [dearest of men] to 'læst ealle well / wære ond winescype, word þa wit spræcon' [pass on the fellowship we have shared and the words we have spoken] in 1171b–3a. Beccel responds with his promise that he will never let the 'lufan sibbe' [1173b; kinship of love] between them grow sluggish.

The spiritual friendship of Guthlac and Beccel – in a Latin monastic context, *amicitia* – is both defined by and distinguished from the secular relationships with which it shares a poetic vocabulary. Yet there remains a tension between the two emotional languages. Guthlac has distanced himself, for example, from his beloved sister, denying himself her presence in this world so that they may be the more perfectly (re)united in the next. Figuratively the unity and division of brother and sister echoes that of Adam and Eve and body and soul as 'sinhiwan tu' [968b; two spouses] united before and separated after the Fall. For Guthlac, the poem suggests, the presence of his sister might have brought with it the memory of secular affiliation, a secular emotional treasure that could tempt him from his saintly resolve.

Similar concerns hedge Guthlac's strange canniness about his conversations with his patron Bartholomew. In this case, Beccel's apparent jealousy prompts Guthlac's revelation of his secretive, nightly conversations. As in Guthlac's reluctance to interact with his sister, so even with the Apostle, secrecy and privacy characterize the dangers attendant on friendship when it is too particular. Just as the possible excess of Guthlac's affection for his sister hints at incest, Guthlac's intimacy with Bartholomew signals the possibility of an excessive or illicit affection between men – although in this case the text denies the suspicions before they are even raised.[19]

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18 Thundy, 'St. Guthlac and Spiritual Friendship'.
19 D. Clark, *Between Medieval Men*.

Even the particularity of Beccel's discipleship is not without its problematic aspect. Beccel announces Guthlac's death to his sister in an elegy which eloquently expresses the grief of a retainer (secular or spiritual) for a departed lord: 'ellen biþ selast þam þe oftost sceal / dreogan dryhtenbealu, deope behycgan / þroht, þeodengedal . . . Þæt wat se þe sceal / aswæsman sarigferð, wat his sincgiefan / holdne biheledne' [1348–53a; courage is best for one who must often endure the death of his lord and ponder deeply the agony of separation from his master . . . With a sad spirit must he wander, who knows that his treasure-giver lies buried]. Paradoxically, the fullest expression of his devotion and desire also betrays a failure of will; the poem ends in Beccel's inability fully to embody the identity Guthlac's model would teach him.

In *Guthlac A*, as in *Guthlac B*, the saint exemplifies appropriate attitudes towards death's necessary journey from secular life into eternal life. And like *Guthlac B*, *Guthlac A* portrays the saint's identity as a *miles Christi* through and against the traditional diction describing the warrior as a valued member of a kin-group. In *Guthlac A*, too, hermits especially are the 'gecostan cempan' [91a; tried warriors] of God, engaged in psychomachia against evil.[20] Guthlac's hermitage is accordingly a watchman's place between this world and the next, the identity of which – whether heaven or hell – must be established through struggle with spirits.

The emptiness of Guthlac's hermitage is in part an absence of kinship. Before its consecration the island in the fen is a place of dispossession and exile. It is a 'dygle stow' [215b; secret place], 'idel and æman' [empty and desolate] and, most significantly, 'eþelriehte feor / bad bisæce betran hyrdes' [far from the hereditary control of a legitimate dynasty, awaiting a better claimant to its title] in lines 216–17. It is telling that one of the sharpest temptations Guthlac undergoes is his longing for the kinship, friends and human love he has left behind in his journey into the fens (and allegorically into the otherworld beyond death). He is tempted, too, through the devils' invocation of the grief his death will cause the kinsmen and friends he has left behind. Yet paradoxically the damned spirits who inhabit the wilderness turn out to be the exiles and not the saint so far from his monastic brothers. And the solitary Guthlac is not as friendless as the crowd of spirits. Such paradoxes inherently question the true nature of estrangement involved in the monastic – or at least the eremitic – life. Eventually Guthlac's victory against devils is signalled and effected by the appearance of Bartholomew, who brings his friendship and support, and (by extension) the friendship of Christ. Guthlac's victory over the demons is thus also a triumph of new friendship and

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20 Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*, vol. i, pp. 111–39.

patronage bonds, new spiritual kinship, and a new spiritual masculinity in his role as retainer of Bartholomew and Christ.

Grounding and firmly establishing Guthlac's saintly identity, this new sense of belonging also renews and sanctifies the landscape. The fenland wilderness is restored to beauty and tranquillity: 'smolt wæs se sigewong ond sele niwe, / fæger fugal reord, folde geblowan; / geacas gear budon' [742–4a; peaceful was the field of victory and his dwelling, beautiful the voice of the birds, the fields blossoming and the cuckoos announced the summer]. Eventually two congregations form around Guthlac. One is the communion of saints and the 'engla fæðmum' [782a; embrace of angels] after death. The other is the congregation of monks, who will themselves follow him from Crowland to heaven. Although the members of this new lineage of 'cempan gecorene' [797a; chosen warriors] do not have to fight literal demons, they still merit their inheritance through diligent battle against the 'firenlustas' [803b; wicked desires] that assail them daily.

Cynewulf: the art of hagiographic self-inscription

The late eighth- or early ninth-century Cynewulf is the only Anglo-Saxon vernacular poet for whom we have both a name and a body of work. His four runic signatures, to the poems known as *Christ II*, *The Fates of the Apostles*, *Juliana* and *Elene*, represent a unique instance of an Anglo-Saxon poet explicitly and self-consciously establishing an identity through his relationship with the subjects of his poems.[21] Each of his poems finds its source in a Latin text: Cynewulf thus also locates himself in and against a Latin antiquity that both is and is not like his Anglo-Saxon present. His translations appropriate and 'naturalize' his literary sources, even as he constructs the journeys and struggles of his sanctified heroes as contexts for his reflections on his own life. In his signature to *Christ II*, for example, Cynewulf confronts his own inevitable death, Doomsday, and the passing away of earthly treasure and strength. He defines himself in a confessional mode as guilty of not having kept the teachings found in books such as that of his source, the twenty-ninth of Gregory's *Forty Homilies on the Gospel*.[22] He expresses a need for friends, and this need drives his desire to exhort his 'leofra' [815a; dear ones] not to neglect the spiritual for the earthly. The link between friendship and spirituality is in

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21 For *Christ II* and *Juliana*, see Muir (ed.), *Exeter Anthology*, vol. 1, pp. 66–81 and 191–217, respectively. For *Fates of the Apostles* and *Elene*, see Krapp (ed.), *Vercelli Book*, pp. 51–4, 66–102.

22 Clemoes, 'Cynewulf's Image of the Ascension'.

fact implicit in all of his autohagiographic inscriptions, even as affiliation and community on the journey to salvation are central to his poetry.

Cynewulf's *Fates of the Apostles* is basically a martyrology. The metaphor of death as a journey controls the description of each of the Apostles as on a journey, as a missionary and (as surely) as a traveller to an appointed martyr's death. Cynewulf devised the song, he says, in preparation for his own death, his own departure from this life. He explicitly claims that he composed the poem from a variety of 'halige bec' [63b; holy books] gathered 'samnode wide' [2b; far and wide]. The poem becomes in effect a retrospective of his life as a scholar, a testimony to the range of texts and models through which he has located his identity as a Christian. The Apostles are, above all else, soldiers: Peter and Paul are bold and brave; Andrew is unflinching in the fight; Bartholomew as well as Simon and Thaddeus are 'beaducræftig beorn' [44a; soldiers strong in the fight]; and Thomas dies as if in a battle, 'sweord ræs fornam þurh hæðene hand' [59b–60a; struck down by the sword blow of a pagan hand]. Cynewulf's signature asks his readers to repay his poem with their prayer. He solicits friends, kinsmen and supporters as he goes on his journey, leaving behind the markers of his earthly life, his body and earthly treasures – although in the signature it is (ironically) the earth that passes away on the Last Day. As his signature makes explicit, the composition and circulation of his poem create a new family (re)produced through verbal exchange, linking his earthly and spiritual kin.

In his signature to the *Fates*, the parallels between poet (and perhaps the community of his readers) and the Apostles are fairly straightforward: all are male, and their masculinity is expressed in traditional Old English poetic diction of Germanic martial heroism. In *Juliana* (which like *Christ II* appears in the Exeter Book) the poet's masculinity locates and defines itself in and against the saint's heroic, resistant femininity – or rather her heroic and almost but not quite transgendering virginity. Although Juliana's life is not one of those collected in Aldhelm's *De uirginitate*, her story, like that of many another virgin martyr, is driven by a mix of sex and violence. Juliana is persecuted by would-be suitor Eleusis and by her father Africanus who has betrothed her against her will. Her martyrdom is thus doubly tied to her rejection of secular (hetero)sexuality, gender and the reproductive demands of her kin-group. The masculinity of Eleusis and Africanus on the other hand is that of warriors. When they talk they 'garas hlændon' [63b; lean spears together]; they partici-pate in a warrior economy. Juliana's dowry – and by extension the acquisition of earthly treasure – is the stated, front-and-centre rationale for the marriage, and Juliana is metaphorically her father's treasure.

Eleusis' earthly, carnal desire turns easily and quickly to rage, and Africanus' fatherly love to persecution. Their 'freondrædenne' [71a; friendship] is based in their violent, pagan (secular) passions. Offering each other counsel and support, the two men bond through the (thwarted) exchange of Juliana's body. Their bond echoes that which links Satan to his minion, the devil who attempts to torment the imprisoned saint. Structures of kinship and lordship in hell are abusive and violent: they invert and mock the supportive and sustaining bond between Juliana and her lord, God. To some extent, the structure of this warrior–lord bond masculinizes Juliana: she is the virgin (*virgo*) as *virago*, acting like a man, a warrior, and the devil likens her to other (male) saints, especially Andrew; no female models are mentioned. Like the Apostle, Juliana is eventually killed (warrior-like) by a slash of a sword – but not before delivering an evangelizing death speech. Her words are the good counsel of a friend, an exhortation to proper worship, a lesson about faithful allegiance to God. Her words (re)produce Christian community in the crowd that escorts her body to her grave. Eleusis, by contrast, dies in a storm at sea, an exile even if still surrounded by retainers, deprived of hall, treasure and all the trappings of secular elite masculinity.

As in all his signatures, Cynewulf's signature in *Juliana* includes an appeal to his readers, a request for readers to remember him and pray for him against the Day of Judgement. It begins, however, with a prayer for the saint's support when (in his allegorical conceit) death separates his own body and his soul, 'sibbe toslitað sinhiwen tu, / micle modlufan' [698–9a; the wedlocked pair whose great love will be severed]. A woman in a man's world, Juliana is allegorically the human soul – in Latin *anima*, grammatically feminine even if conceptually beyond earthly gender – tempted and tested as *miles Christi*. Cynewulf's veneration of the saint prompts his confession, even as the saint forces the devil to confess his crimes – the numberless temptations of good men that Cynewulf has failed.

Elene, collected like *The Fates of the Apostles* in the Vercelli Book, is in some ways the most narratively complex of Cynewulf's poems. Its negotiation of gender is also less explicit. Like Juliana, Elene is a lone woman in an otherwise exclusively male world. Structurally she is at the heart of the narrative, flanked by the conversions of her biological son Constantine and her spiritual son Judas/Cyriacus. The poem opens with Constantine, in his pivotal battle against the Huns – archetypal pagans – before which he experiences a vision of the cross and converts. Traditional martial imagery recurs throughout this episode, especially in the repeated versions of the beasts of battle trope, and the world in which the poem opens is one of almost excessive martial

masculinity. As Constantine's emissary on a journey to the Holy Land – both allegorically and literally – Elene partakes of the same warrior power.

However, as judge – and her judicial torture of Judas is particularly problematic for modern readers – Elene is an agent of change and conversion. Parallels to monastic rule and discipline are suggestive: it is likely that Cynewulf was a monk in a double house ruled by an abbess and, like an abbess, Elene is also a preacher of sorts, a teacher to Judas and the Hebrews. Judas' conversion, his baptism as Cyriacus, recalls Saul's transformation into Paul. It also echoes the conversion of someone like Guthlac (and conceivably Cynewulf himself) from secular to monastic community. It is at Elene's instigation, too, that the three crosses are tested to determine by miracle which is the true cross of Christ: she organizes the spectacle which restores one corpse to literal life and brings about as well the spread of Christianity both in Jerusalem and (through the spread of the cult of the holy cross) elsewhere in Christian time and space. She is *Ecclesia*, repeatedly characterized by the strength of her empowered and empowering Will – 'þæt seo cwen begeat / willan in worulde' (1151b–2a), 'wifes willan' (1131a), 'cwene willa' (1135a) – a point of feminine allegorical stability which enables male conversion.

Cynewulf's signature to *Elene*, the longest and most elaborate of the four, presents the poet as weaving an art in or of words: like Judas / Cyriacus he is a scholar, book-learned. It provides, in fact, a fuller and more detailed narrative of personal conversion. Stained with the sins of his youth, bound by guilt, Cynewulf says that he was granted pardon and grace – and given the poetic craft that has allowed him to both ponder and praise the holy cross. Like his other signatures, this one is also linked with the Last Judgement: it contains an extended eschatological prophecy. As in all four signatures, Cynewulf situates himself and his poetry in relation to the end of his life. In both *Elene* and *Juliana* the signatures define Cynewulf by his relationship with the female figure that plays the central role in his poems' narratives, whether as confessor or agent of conversion. That relation does not entail simple identification and imitation, although each includes some pointed parallelisms, repetition of imagery, and associations with the soul / body dyad.

Eugenia, Euphrosyne, and Mary of Egypt: transvestite sanctity, holy harlotry, and the male reader of female sanctity

If Cynewulf, like Aldhelm, invokes female saints whose model and allegorical figuration can cross gender lines, an even more literally transgendering

virginity is at issue in the Old English prose Lives of Eugenia and Euphrosyne. Mary of Egypt, on the other hand, turns a woman definitely not a virgin – a woman who in her youth deploys her sexuality transgressively even by secular standards – into an ideal whose figuration embraces much of what virginity covers in other texts. Each Life (and each differently) negotiates in the vernacular an ideal offered by a universal and distinctly non-Anglo-Saxon saint. The 'foreignness' of the saints remains, however, and contains something of the threat their aberrations offer.

To some extent Eugenia and Euphrosyne literalize the metaphorical transformation of *virgo* into *virago*. The implied simile polices as well as troubles the distinction between genders: the very rejection of femininity that implies the superiority of masculinity also reveals a failure of stable difference and the permeability of the boundaries between male and female, Christian and non-Christian. And with that permeability comes a danger: the same permeability that allows Eugenia and Euphrosyne to convert to a better life also allows for the possibility of a 'conversion' or reversion to sin. Mary of Egypt is also a figure of conversion and movement between opposite extremes: overly sexual in her early career, she rejects her previous physical sensuality for a life of passionate repentance and spirituality. If Eugenia and Euphrosyne blur the duality of gender, Mary rejects any moderation in sexuality.

Like Cynewulf's Juliana and Elene, all three are women amidst male spectators and audience. Female saints like Eugenia, Euphrosyne and Mary function as intermediaries for male readers outside as for male spectators within texts. Old English translations of *vitae* of all three appear together in manuscript collections. London, British Library, MS Cotton Julius E. vii, the principal manuscript of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, including his *Eugenia*, also contains *Euphrosyne* and *Mary of Egypt*. *Euphrosyne* and *Mary of Egypt* also appear together in another early eleventh-century manuscript, London, British Library, MS Cotton Otho B. x. Eugenia's is one of five Lives of female saints – all virgins – in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*. Like Agatha, Agnes and Cecilia, Eugenia is a non-native saint; all four are also to be found in Aldhelm's *De uirginitate*. Unlike Aldhelm, Ælfric directs his *Lives* to a primarily lay audience, men like the named ealdormen Æthelweard and Æthelmær, supportive of monastic communities, especially those communities active in the Benedictine Reform movement. With these men as an exemplary exterior audience, within the text itself Eugenia is repeatedly perceived through male eyes – those of her father Philippus, of the priest Eutropius who recommends her to the bishop for baptism, of the abbot who receives her into the monastery, and of the other monks of the community. The female gaze in

the text is more problematic: it is the transgressive and lustful gaze of another woman, Melantia, which leads to her exposure. Yet that revelation, made first to her grieving father in his role as judge, and then to the rest of her birth family, leads to their conversion, and to their support of Christianity (significantly through their endowment of churches) in a secular pagan world.

Eugenia's desire to pass as male is produced by her education, and her growing desire to convert. Like Ælfric's readers she is between states, not yet fully converted from secular to spiritual. Similarly medial figures, the eunuchs Protus and Jacinctus, share Eugenia's education as well as her apparent but not real full masculinity. They are the middle ground through which she must pass: they cut her hair and reclothe her in male attire for her sojourn. Grammatically, however, even as a monk Eugenia is always 'she': the text is never taken in by her transvestitism. When she returns to her 'proper' gender she founds a more gender-appropriate monastery for religious women, and welcomes within its walls her mother Claudia (and other chaste widows) and the virgin Basilla, who has yearned to imitate her. Consequently Eugenia will be martyred. Her career thus brings her from paganism to Christianity – with fullest Christianity figured and identified through the virgin martyr's pure and undefiled female body. But her struggle and the temptations incumbent upon saintly and monastic life are enacted in an apparently male body.

Although a non-Ælfrician text, *Euphrosyne* reflects a similar reading and manuscript context. The saint's cult saw a rise in popularity after 1050, during the period of the Benedictine Reform movement. A virgin but not a martyr, the asceticism of her life perhaps accounts for her popularity. Like Eugenia, Euphrosyne is defined by male discourse, even as her text is exchanged among male authors and readers.[23] Within the text, too, Euphrosyne is, from her birth, a woman surrounded by men. The only child of elderly Christian parents, Euphrosyne was born through the combined prayers of her father Paphnuntius and the abbot who will eventually become in effect a second father to her. When she comes of age, Euphrosyne is greatly desired and courted, and her marriage is arranged in a second male–male exchange, between her father and his prospective son-in-law. Relatively passive up to this point, Euphrosyne rejects marriage and her secular life for a place in a monastery, and enacts that conversion by changing her clothes – and her identity – from woman to man. Unlike the transvestite Eugenia, the disguised

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23 Frantzen, 'When Women Aren't Enough'; Szarmach, 'St. Euphrosyne'; Scheil, 'Somatic Ambiguity'.

Euphrosyne – now renamed Smaragdus – is grammatically transgendered: 'she' becomes 'he'.

Nevertheless, the text inscribes some ambiguity about the transformation. Smaragdus claims, for example, to be a eunuch; like Eugenia's eunuchs Protus and Jacinctus, s/he occupies a middle, transitional or fluid space. It is perhaps because of this as much as the result of the beauty and desirability that attend virgin saints, that Smaragdus becomes a source of temptation to the other monks: her transformation reveals the permeability of borders, and the possibility of sin as well as holiness. Smaragdus must consequently be more strictly cloistered. The text in this way exhibits some conflict and anxiety about the fluidity of the gender of Euphrosyne/Smaragdus. The completeness of the disguise or transgendering would not, however, constitute the matter for wonder that it does if it were not eventually exposed. In this case Smaragdus on his deathbed confesses to his father that she is really his daughter Euphrosyne. After her death she becomes known for her miraculous healings and intercessory prayer for the men of her (his) community. When her father finally enters the monastery himself – completing the bond between himself and the abbot with which Euphrosyne's story begins – he occupies the same cell as his daughter/son.

Mary of Egypt plays a role even more structurally and thematically an object within clerical male discourse in both the original Greek Life and in its subsequent Latin translation.[24] The Old English translation, probably from the later tenth century, defines her even more markedly by her position in a series of male–male exchanges. The Old English text announces its subject as 'ðas herigendlicestan gehwyrfednysse ægþer ge dæde ge þeawa þa micelan hreowsunga and swa ellenlic gewinn þære arwurðan Egyptiscan Marian' [the most praiseworthy conversion in actions and morals and the great repentance and brave struggle of the noble Mary of Egypt].[25] The translation proper, however, begins with the Latin text's preface, invoking the example of the archangel Raphael's words to the blind prophet Tobit about the necessity of revealing the wonders wrought by God, even as it is wrong to reveal the secrets of earthly rulers. The Old English translation adopts the Latin preface's first-person statement of authorial intention to follow this dictate by exposing Mary's holy story. Appropriating even the 'I' from the Latin original, the translator merges and elides his identity with that of the original hagiographer, just as the hagiographer merges in part (or at least continues) the revelations

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24 Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, esp. pp. 84–94; Burrus, *Sex Lives of Saints*.
25 Magennis (ed.), *Saint Mary of Egypt*, p. 58.

of Zosimus within the Life. The narrative proper begins, indeed, not with Mary's story, but with that of the monk Zosimus, his excellence as a member of the community of men among whom he has lived his entire life, and especially his yearning for more and more and ever greater knowledge of God.

It is Zosimus' search that leads him to the desert and his encounter with Mary. Within the text, then, from the first reference to the blind Tobit through to the end, knowledge is associated with sight, with spectacle. And Mary – or more especially Mary's body – is first and foremost a spectacle, something seen. Its nakedness, its ability to be seen, whether with or without shame, is primary. The virgin's body in virgin martyr narratives is most often concealed from sight: try as they might, tormentors are not able to tear away the virgin's clothes, or they have their prurient gaze thwarted. Its nakedness is, more often than not, obscured and denied at the very moment it is invoked. The younger Mary, excessively and transgressively sexual – and serving her own individual lusts and desires – is by no means merely the passive object of her lovers' gaze. She herself invites exposure, and offers her body to their gaze. As the repentant hermit, her clothing having worn through, she still tacitly invites and prompts exposure even as she seeks to cover her nakedness with Zosimus' cloak. Her shame about her nakedness implies the association of nakedness with her previous female seduction of men, but her 'temptation' for Zosimus is ultimately more to do with his 'lust', his zeal for the knowledge of God. The younger Mary's sexual desire thus connotes (and ironically figures) Zosimus' desire for knowledge and spiritual perfection.

Figuratively Mary of Egypt, like the Blessed Virgin Mary who is her namesake and opposite – and whose icon precipitates her conversion – is an intermediary between God and man. Even the place of their conversation, the river Jordan, is itself a site of transition, a place of baptism and conversion, and a zone travelled through on the journey to the Promised Land. Having made – and having embodied – the journey between Alexandria and Jerusalem, the City of Man and the City of God, Mary of Egypt ends there, remaining in the medial. Her burial place remains a boundary between community and the wilderness: having seen to her interment, Zosimus goes back to his monastery, and the lion that has guarded her body returns to the desert. In her text Mary represents a figure through which Zosimus – and those beyond Zosimus who read and retell her story – reify pre-existing (male) monastic kinships and gender identities. Eugenia and Euphrosyne, by contrast, are shown negotiating the similarities as well as the differences between original, secular kinships

(and their original, secular gender identifications) and those recreated in a monastic context. In all three cases, however, Old English translators write (and readers read) their way into monastic and literary kinships and communities through the women's Lives.

Reading saints and remaking selves

The reading and embodying of the Latin *vitae* of universal saints by native saints, whose *vitae* were in turn read and translated in text and Anglo-Saxon bodies, is thus far from simple, far from unproblematic. Ælfric's fifth female and only native female Life, for example, is that of Æthelthryth, whose life he takes from Bede's narrative of her life, holy death and later translation (*HE*, IV.19–20). But what led Æthelthryth to live out a virginity so seemingly at odds with the role of royal bride that she was supposed to play? Bede's Latin version of her life – and most explicitly his hymn in her praise – situates her resistant and persistent virginity beside that of virgin martyrs like Agatha, Agnes and Cecilia among the Roman virgin martyrs presented as parallels and models for the Anglo-Saxon woman's role as queen and Bride of Christ.[26] How did Æthelthryth's exposure to the lives (and Lives) of such saints affect her own life as she lived it? The virgin martyrs / marriage resistors among the universal saints offer models set safely in a distant and idealized past, not in a volatile Anglo-Saxon present. They are, for that reason, the more available for allegorical interpretation and symbolic extrapolation. Even in Bede's narrative of her life Æthelthryth remains an Anglo-Saxon elite woman whose gender and sexuality are defined and deployed in the interests of her Anglo-Saxon elite family. Her marriages are acts of dynastic politics that she accepts (by marrying) even as she denies (by remaining virgin). Aldhelm may have praised examples of couples living out mutual conjugal chastity, and Æthelthryth may have positioned herself in such a union, but not so much her husband, King Ecgfrith.

Although female saints may have elicited from modern readers critical questions about gender and sexuality rather more often than male saints, the example of Guthlac reminds us of the importance of interrogating constructions of masculinity at the same time. Does Guthlac's masculinity change with conversion from the secular to the monastic world? Or is this ex-warrior still a warrior, albeit in a different sphere, a spiritual warrior, but still fulfilling in some sense the expectations of a culture in which one word for 'man',

26 *HE*, IV.20. On Æthelthryth, see, e.g., Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*.

wæpnedman, foregrounds a warrior's weapons as a marker of full masculinity? What, then, are the possibilities of living out the saintly life – and saintly masculinity – in the secular world? And how might these identities come into conflict? The Lives of Anglo-Saxon saints reveal many contradictions between the ideals associated with the Latin past and Anglo-Saxon social realities. Æthelthryth's life problematizes even as it reconciles competing possibilities for aristocratic femininity in Anglo-Saxon Christianity. The Lives of the non-Anglo-Saxon Elene and Juliana, or of Eugenia, Euphrosyne and Mary of Egypt, may be more easily assimilated, especially as a means through which male monastic hagiographers like Cynewulf and Ælfric can (re)configure male identity.

Even more questions, though, may be asked about the way saints' Lives and lives were read by later would-be and never-will-be saints. The issue here is, in part, what might be called autohagiography: the process by which readers do or do not, can or cannot, should or should not imitate a saintly model. To what extent did local saints explicitly model themselves on literary exemplars of the Roman past? Guthlac's career suggests he felt some emulative kinship, some connection to Bartholomew. But what of non-saintly readers? There must always be some difference between saints and even their most devout and diligent imitators. Beccel remains a non-saintly disciple of St Guthlac, even if Guthlac successfully emulates his saintly patron. Cynewulf inscribes his difference from as well as his imitation of the model, holy subjects of his poems. His runic signatures speak to the struggle between the ideal and the real.

Even more completely failed (auto)hagiographical projects, moreover, may reveal further insight into the negotiation of sanctity in Anglo-Saxon England. Coifi, in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, is perhaps most memorable for being the advisor to King Edwin who does not use the sparrow-in-the-mead-hall metaphor (*HE*, ii.13). Coifi offers instead pragmatic – one might even say cynical – arguments about the worthlessness of loyalty to the pagan gods. In the end, St-Martin-like, he destroys and profanes his own pagan temple. Whether or not Coifi, as a pagan in a hybrid court, had ever heard Martin's story, or was consciously imitating it, within this narrative he is caught in a web of Christian references even before he is actively part of the conversion process. One consequence of that conversion impacts on his gender and sexuality identities. Coifi puts on a more certain masculinity when he converts: he receives the weapons and the stallion his position as high priest had previously denied him. Yet ultimately any imitation of St Martin fails. The site of Coifi's temple 'is known today as Goodmanham', and Coifi may be a good man. But

Goodmanham does not become a Christian holy place. Nor is Coifi a saint. Ostensibly friendless (at least within the narrative), he and his story are ephemeral traces of failure. Nevertheless, his very failure – and especially the narrative structure in which it is told – ironically witnesses the power of hagiographical models to define gender and sexuality as well as sanctity within Anglo-Saxon England.

Chapter 16

Sacred history and Old English religious poetry

ANDREW SCHEIL

When confronted by the large extant corpus of Anglo-Saxon vernacular poetry on religious subjects, one is puzzled by a very basic question. Why poetry?[1] Why should a culture bother to express religious discourse in poetic form? If religion constitutes a series of answers to a culture's spoken and unspoken existential questions, how does a poetic 'answer' serve that need better or more powerfully than a non-poetic answer? In one way or another, all of the poems treated in this essay are expressions of religious belief, a complex problem for religious studies scholars. How does poetry relate to belief? What is it about poetry, qua poetry, that resonates with belief?[2]

This essay sketches out some ideas about belief in Anglo-Saxon vernacular religious poetry to suggest new critical directions for the study of this poetry and to encourage a productive critical revisionism. My selective critical survey of this fascinating literature draws upon two disciplines: the perspective of religious studies – an interdisciplinary field that itself incorporates anthropology, sociology, history, theology and philosophy in a cross-cultural, comparative context;[3] and the recent return to formalism in literary criticism.[4]

Vernacular theology, poetry and belief

In order to examine belief in Old English religious poetry from a religious studies perspective, it would be useful to adapt the concept of 'vernacular

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1 For introductions, see Shepherd, 'Scriptural Poetry'; the reprinted essays collected in Liuzza (ed.), *Poems of MS Junius 11*; and Conner, 'Religious Poetry'.
2 For a study of belief in Old English prose, see Lees, *Tradition and Belief*.
3 See Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. For a medievalist historian's practical synthesis of ideas from religious studies, see Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism*.
4 See Levinson, 'What is New Formalism?'. A longer version of this review article, with extensive bibliographic appendices, can be found at www.sitemaker.umich.edu/pmla_article/home. For a seminal article on the aesthetics of Old English scriptural poetry, see Frank, 'Some Uses of Paronomasia'.

theology' from the field of Middle English studies.[5] In Middle English studies, vernacular theology – the florescence of late medieval English devotional writing in prose and verse during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – is often explained as an act of implicit or explicit political resistance; the politics of the vernacular and its incipient theology are a manifestation of burgeoning lay readership and lay religiosity and its proto-Reformation conflict with ecclesiastical orthodoxy. If there is an analogous 'vernacular theology' in England before the eleventh century, it does not seem to encode an intentionally oppositional politics; rather, one could argue (based on examples such as Bede's story of Cædmon or Aldhelm's reputed ability to compose vernacular poetry), that vernacular theology held a more central place and a more supportive, normative role in Anglo-Saxon culture.

Two characteristics of vernacular theology seem particularly useful for the study of Old English poetry. The first is the notion that religious ideas expressed in vernacular texts deserve to be analysed in their own right, on their own terms, and assessed as expressions of religiosity without the implicit measure of their level of deviance from (orthodox) Latin texts conditioning our response to them. It is thus important to adopt the *functionalist* perspective common to the field of religious studies. That is, given the *specific* architecture of a vernacular expression of religiosity, how does it present a *sui generis* (or *sui Anglicae*) understanding of its expressed religious content? What is its *function*, on its own terms?

Second, we should be finely attuned to the open, syncretic nature of medieval vernacular theology: according to Middle English scholarship, the vernacular is a protean, fluid medium, often incorporating a variety of discursive practices; in comparison to Latin, the vernacular allows for a greater range of experimentation, allusion, parody and imitation. As Rita Copeland notes, vernacular translation subverts the 'symbolically unified intellectual discourse' of the Latin exegetical tradition through the vernacular's 'linguistic multiplicity'.[6] This binary opposition between Latin and vernacular does not quite do justice to the fluidity and creativity of Anglo-Latin literature, early or late medieval; and so, in fact, the careful study of early medieval vernacular theology – in Anglo-Saxon England or elsewhere – might lead to a broader

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5 For an excellent overview of the concept, see Gillespie, 'Vernacular Theology'; see also the cluster of short essays on the topic in the special issue *ELN*, 44 (2006), 77–126. Donoghue's contribution, 'Tremulous Hand', calls for an engagement of Anglo-Saxon studies with vernacular theology. Another useful term would be 'imaginative theology', as proposed by Newman in *God and the Goddesses*, p. 292 (see also pp. 294–304).
6 Copeland, *Rhetoric*, p. 97.

reassessment of the interaction between Latin and vernacular throughout the Middle Ages.

If vernacular theology displays an underestimated creative potential, vernacular religious *poetry* represents an even more idiosyncratic expression of its content. Poetry is a distinct form of knowledge.[7] In Middle English studies, C. David Benson and Jim Rhodes have argued that the concept of vernacular theology does not take enough account of the distinctive nature of poetry.[8] When ideas (in this case religious ideas) are expressed in poetic form, they take on a particular shape not reducible to the paraphrasable content of the expression. Poets, no matter their time or place, warp or change content when that content is expressed in poetic form. By this I mean a range of transformations: not only in the most obvious sense do the exigencies of metrical form, poetic vocabulary and formulaic conventions dictate the 'shape' of expressed religious ideas, but also the overall phenomenon that is the poetic experience itself communicates its ideas in such a way that the expressed content shifts in both overt and subtle ways. As Helen Vendler explains, when 'culturally received "ideas" are reinvented in metrical and symbolic form', they change; that is, 'once domesticated in the topologically flexible bed of poetry, "ideas" are bent into peculiar shapes'.[9]

How, then, does Old English religious verse – exhibiting both the eclectic capaciousness of the vernacular and the singularity of poetry – function as an expression of religious belief? Belief is a vital element in religiosity. In fact, 'believing' is itself a provisional concept; there is a difference between believing and knowing, between belief and knowledge.[10] Belief is always provisional, paired with uncertainty. Expressions of belief have an integral element of disbelief; without disbelief (or the potential for disbelief), there would be no belief. Belief is predicated upon disbelief. The statement 'Credo in Deum patrem omnipotentem' contains within its hermeneutic structure the *possibility* that others do *not* believe in God the Father Almighty, or that the speaker once did not believe, but now does; or believes now, but possibly will not in the future.[11] We might term this covert disbelief 'supplemental disbelief'.

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7 See, e.g., Vendler, *Poets Thinking*.
8 C. D. Benson, 'Salvation'; Rhodes, *Poetry Does Theology*.
9 Vendler, *Poets Thinking*, p. 12.
10 See Griffiths (ed.), *Knowledge and Belief*; and Certeau, 'What We Do When We Believe'.
11 See Lopez, Jr: 'the statement, "I believe in . . . ," is sensible only when there are others who "do not"; it is an agonistic affirmation of something that cannot be submitted to ordinary rules of verification' ('Belief', p. 33).

Belief is a momentary alignment of all the proper elements, a fragile flash of light. Belief, as H. H. Price puts it, 'is fallible and indirect'.[12] And in this phenomenological fragility, belief resembles art or poetry. Belief, like poetry, is something *in process* that can be apprehended only in the fullness of its phenomenological unfolding, in the moment of its expression. Therefore, when we look to the vernacular expression of religious belief in Anglo-Saxon poetry, we should attune ourselves to its dynamic qualities, to the way any individual poem, in its own idiosyncratic vernacular particularity, marshals its powers against the supplement of disbelief, but nevertheless incorporates that disbelief (often residing within the indeterminacies of poetic metaphor) into its very structure.

Since Old English poetry is notoriously resistant to generic categories, and questions of date and provenance often beguile a historicized treatment of the poetry, our survey of belief in Old English religious poetry needs an alternative rubric. My choice is to move outside the poetry, in a sense, to the overarching structure of Christian sacred history (*Heilsgeschichte*), an all-encompassing expression of religious belief. Christian tradition divided the history of the world – past, present and future – into a scheme of sacred history that reflected God's ongoing intersection with humanity, the 'six ages of the world', a historical narrative based upon key moments in Christian sacred history: the First Age (Adam to the Flood); the Second Age (the Flood to Abraham); the Third Age (Abraham to King David); the Fourth Age (King David to the Babylonian Captivity); the Fifth Age (the Babylonian Captivity to the birth of Christ); the Sixth Age (the birth of Christ to Final Judgement). The here and now of the early medieval historical world comprised the Sixth Age, the last age of the world, the world grown old.[13] The Six Ages scheme set history into an ordered whole and provided a teleology, an organized background for the workings of the poetic imagination. By placing Old English vernacular religious poetry into the sequence of sacred history according to its subject matter, we can see the religiosity expressed in the poetry from a summary, schematic perspective.[14] The primary poems treated in this essay will be *Genesis A*, *Exodus*, *Kentish Psalm 50*, *Daniel* and *Christ I*.

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12 Price, 'Some Considerations about Belief', p. 43. See also Certeau's concept of belief as an 'expectational practice' ('What We Do When We Believe', pp. 192–3).

13 See Dean, *World Grown Old*, pp. 39–46; and Allen, 'Universal History', pp. 31–5.

14 The Six Ages are not explicitly cited in any of the Old English poems under consideration; however, the concept does appear in the prologue of the Old Saxon *Heliand*, lines 46a–9.

The First Age

Bede tells us that 'the First Age of this world, then, is from Adam to Noah' ('Prima est ergo mundi huius aetas ab Adam usque ad Noe'), and ends with the 'universal Flood' ('uniuersali diluuio').[15] In extant Old English poetry, the First Age is treated mainly in *Genesis A* and *Genesis B*, found in the 'Junius manuscript' (Oxford, Bodleian Junius 11); the poems narrate such high points of salvation history as the Creation, the Fall of Man, Cain and Abel and Noah's Flood. Dated to the end of the tenth century, the Junius manuscript contains the poems known to modern editorial tradition as *Genesis A*, *Genesis B*, *Exodus*, *Daniel* and *Christ and Satan*.[16] The manuscript is illustrated and appears to have been compiled according to some unity of conception, though scholars differ on the exact nature of that unity and by extension the use or purpose of the manuscript.[17] The *Genesis* poem (2936 lines) contains a long interpolation (235–851) designated by scholarly tradition as *Genesis B*; a composition quite distinct in style and execution from *Genesis A*, *Genesis B* is an Old English translation of an Old Saxon poem on Genesis. In the manuscript, of course, such divisions are not marked; thus there is some warrant for seeing the two poems as separate works and some merit in treating them as one poem. *Genesis A* is a fairly faithful translation/adaptation of its main Vulgate source (Genesis 1–22:12) with occasional modifications ranging from small details to larger expansions drawn from a variety of sources. *Genesis A*'s narrative runs from the Fall of the Angels through Creation to Adam and Eve and their progeny, and ends with the story of Abraham and Isaac. The interpolated *Genesis B* focuses more sharply on the Fall of the Angels, the imprisonment of Satan and the Fall of Man. The overall impression of the First Age as presented in the *Genesis* poems is one of cyclical entropy – promise leads only to disappointment, as the logic of the Fall (initiated by Adam and Eve, but foreshadowed by the Fall of the Angels) proceeds again and again to disaster and corruption in the face of promise and perfection. In order to

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15 Bede, *De temporum ratione*, LXVI.2 (trans. *Reckoning of Time*, p. 157). Citations of *De temporum ratione* are by chapter and section number. On the First Age, see also Ælfric, *Libellus* (the 'Letter to Sigeweard'), line 134.

16 Krapp (ed.), *Junius Manuscript*. The scriptural poems of the Junius manuscript were to some extent inspired by the work of the late antique biblical Latin poets: Juvencus (fourth century), Caelius Sedulius and Prudentius (fifth) and Avitus and Arator (sixth). See Lapidge, 'Versifying the Bible'.

17 See Karkov, *Text and Picture*.

illustrate the singularity of vernacular religious poetry, I briefly examine an example of metaphoric augmentation or dilation in *Genesis A* that creates a unique architecture of belief.

The *Genesis A* poet delivers a vibrant, expansive rendition of Noah's Flood (1270–1542). One small detail may give us a sense of how vernacular poetry transforms its theological subject matter. Although the only word used to designate the ark in the Vulgate source is 'arca', the Old English poem deploys a far richer lexicon. Seventeen separate terms are used for the ark, eight of them more than once: 'cofa' (once: 1464b); 'earc' (eleven times: 1313b, 1333a, 1354b, 1357a, 1366a, 1389a, 1403b, 1423a, 1450a, 1461b, 1488a); 'fær' (four times: 1307a, 1323b, 1394b, 1419a); 'geofonhus' (once: 1321a); 'hof' (four times: 1316b, 1345b, 1393b, 1489a); 'holmærn' (once: 1422b); 'hus' (once: 1442b); 'lid' (three times: 1332a, 1410b, 1479a); 'mereciest' (once: 1317a); 'merehus' (twice: 1303a, 1364a); 'nægledbord' (twice: 1418b, 1433b); 'salwedbord' (once: 1481a); 'scip' (five times: 1302b, 1306b, 1391a, 1417a, 1436b); 'sundreced' (once: 1335a); 'þellfæsten' (once: 1482a); 'wægþel' (three times: 1358a, 1446a, 1496a) 'wudufæsten' (once: 1312a). What is the effect of this poetic variation on the theological ideas expressed? In one sense we can see that such variation might reveal different aspects of the denoted term and thus render a deeper, more multifaceted poetic experience: seeing something from various semantic angles helps one to understand it better. Yet the series of shifting images also points towards the artifice of the poetic representation itself. The reader becomes progressively aware, upon each lexical change, that the sacred narrative is mediated by a poet, by the artistic impulse, and thus the form calls attention, inevitably, to the poem's fabricated nature. As George Steiner states in his study of the rhetoric of creation, 'The work of art, of poetics, carries within it, as it were, the scandal of its hazard, the perception of its ontological caprice.'[18] The vernacular lexical variety of the ark works to enhance the sanctity of such a dignified subject, like the string of epithets for God in Cædmon's *Hymn*; yet, through a kind of irony, this very lexical richness on display implies that what the reader experiences here is not an unmediated experience of the theological content, but is, rather, shaped by the poet's eye. And here we see the incipient analogy between poetry and belief: in the same way that an expression of belief carries with it the supplement of disbelief, so too does the poetic artifice carry within it the 'perception of its ontological caprice'.

18 Steiner, *Grammars of Creation*, p. 29. See also J. Wood, *Broken Estate*, pp. xx, 55.

The Second Age

According to Bede, the Second Age of the world begins on the day Noah comes forth from the Ark, and runs from Noah to Abraham.[19] The Second Age witnesses a renewed genesis of humanity as Noah's sons become the progenitors of all the earth's people. Corruption follows promise once again, however, as Noah's son Ham is cursed by his father for laughing at Noah's naked drunkenness. From Ham's cursed line come Nimrod and the founding of Babylon; the Tower of Babel rises and God punishes humanity with the sundering of tongues.

Once again, the poetic reimagining of these narratives creates a new phenomenon of belief. Although the salvation of Noah and his family establishes a new beginning, the corruption of humanity is inevitable, given the primal fall of Adam and Eve. This entropic logic is left implicit in the Bible, but the *Genesis A* poet renders it aesthetically explicit. *Genesis A* draws clear connections between the pre-Flood corruption of humanity and the post-Flood rebirth of that same corruption: the poet connects the Cain and Abel story to the Curse of Ham narrative with a series of correspondences and verbal echoes. Both episodes are set in agricultural scenes, and in both cases the poet augments the agricultural imagery of the source. A web of verbal echoes links both episodes (marked in bold below). In the first line after fitt XXIIII, the poem begins the story of Noah's post-Flood life by telling us that he 'began' ('**ongan**', 1555a) to establish a home ('ham staðelian', 1556b) after the Flood; the narrator initiates the Cain and Abel episode by telling us that Adam and Even 'began' ('**Ongunnon**', 965a) to bear children; and from Cain's crime, evil acts 'began' to sprout ('sprytan **ongunnon**', 995a). Noah settled his home with his kin ('mid **hleomagum**', 1556a); likewise Cain struck Abel his kinsman ('freo**mæg** ofsloh', 983b); and when questioned by God about Abel, Cain retorts that he does not know the whereabouts of his kinsman ('**hleomæges** sið', 1007a); God then sentences him to be hated by friendly kin ('wine**magum** lað', 1021a), to be exiled far from kin ('freo**magum** feor', 1039a), and to turn from mother and kin ('meder and **magum**', 1048a). After the Flood Noah settles his new home and begins to till the earth ('and **to eorðan** him ætes **tilian**', 1557); Cain, in very similar language, also worked the land ('Oðer his **to eorðan** elnes **tilode**', 972). 'Earth' is a pervasive key word in the Cain and Abel episode: God asks Cain where 'on earth' Abel could be ('**eorðan**', 1003b); Cain confesses that he poured out his blood 'upon the earth' ('on **eorðan**', 1031a);

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19 Bede, *De temporum ratione*, LXVI.20 (trans. *Reckoning of Time*, p. 162); Ælfric, *Libellus*, lines 134–5.

the narrator tells us that Cain's crime was an awful moment for 'earth-dwellers' ('**eorð**buende', 1000a). Noah 'worked and toiled and established a vineyard' ('**won** and **worhte**, wingeard sette', 1558); these verbs 'won' and 'worhte' – from *winnan* [toil or suffer/endure] and *(for)wyrcan* [(mis-)do/accomplish] – are key words in the Cain and Abel episode: God says that Cain will 'endure' punishment for his act ('wite **winnan**', 1014a); Cain admits that he has 'accomplished' ('**forworht**', 1024b) an evil thing against God's command. Noah 'set' or 'established' ('**sette**', 1558b) a vineyard, echoing the mark God 'set' on Cain ('tacen **sette**', 1044b). Noah sowed seeds and eagerly laboured so that the 'green earth' ('**grene folde**', 1561b) would bring forth 'beautiful bright fruit' ('**wlitebeorhte wæstmas**', 1560), 'year-bright gifts' ('gear**torhte** gife', 1561a). This calls to mind the narrator's commentary on the ramifications of Cain's crime: the poet tells us that the first murder would bear 'bitter fruits' ('reðe **wæstme**', 990a) in the future; God sends Cain into exile and tells him that the earth shall no longer yield up 'bright fruits' ('**wæstmas** ... **wlitige**', 1015b–16a) for his use; the 'green earth' ('**grene folde**', 1018a) will withhold its 'benefits' and 'brilliance' ('**hroðra** ... **glæmes**', 1017b–18a). All these aesthetic details are poetic additions to the simple biblical source: that after the Flood Noah began to be a farmer and to work the earth ('exercere terram', Genesis 9:20).

Echoic repetition is an established aesthetic technique of Old English poetry; repeated use of words renders them key words, ever more pregnant with meaning through each successive iteration. Moreover, this technique plays a unifying role, enhancing a sense of poetic, conceptual continuity – the delight of artifice – across episodes of the poem. The ramifications of these aesthetic practices for religious belief can be found in the ideological implication of this echoic cross-referencing, its constant play of verbal prolepsis and analepsis. The echoic linking of episodes imparts a cyclical unity to human endeavours in the Second Age. The echoic pattern in poetry, hearing and re-hearing, reflects the analogous patterns of sacred history – the plan behind human events, the shaping design to history that has claims on human belief.

The Third Age

Bede tells us that the Third Age of the world begins with the birth of the patriarch Abraham and covers the period from Abraham to David.[20] The

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20 Bede, *De temporum ratione*, LXVI.38, 4 (trans. *Reckoning of Time*, pp. 165, 157); Ælfric, *Libellus*, lines 164–5.

Hebrew flight from Egypt falls in the Third Age, and is memorably depicted in the Old English poem *Exodus*, a 590-line composition following *Genesis* in the Junius manuscript. *Exodus* is one of the most difficult and enigmatic poems in the Old English corpus, presenting numerous lexical and textual difficulties.[21] It is an adaptation of chapters 13 and 14 of the Book of Exodus (the crossing of the Red Sea), often narrated in a highly enigmatic fashion.

In *Exodus* the riddling and extravagantly metaphorical character of early medieval Germanic poetry seems to be given free rein.[22] The poem's opening praises the 'judgements and wondrous law' of Moses ('domas', 'wræclico wordriht', 3b–4a), but then quickly focuses on the Hebrew host's travels into distant borderlands ('mearclandum on', 67b). In very simple language, the biblical source explains that God accompanied the Hebrews in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night (Exodus 13:21–2). In much the same way that the *Genesis A* poet dilates the lexicon of the ark, the *Exodus* poet creates an elaborate shifting metaphor out of this brief (but suggestive) raw material. The poet's dilation begins by telling us that God 'spread a covering over the burning heavens' ('bælce oferbrædde byrnendne heofon', 73); but then the image immediately changes with a different, apposed object for the same verb: he '(covered) the fiery air with a holy weave (net?)' ('halgan nette hatwendne lyft', 74). Moving then back to the primary referent, we learn that this cloud ('wederwolcen', 75a) stood between the earth and the sky; but then the poem takes a metaphorical swerve again as this cloud 'drank', or 'quenched' or 'engulfed' ('adranc', 77b), the fire of the sun. (Can a cloud 'drink'?) The drinking cloud image is then left behind for a new metaphor as the poet explains that 'the shelter of the day-shield moved over the clouds' ('Dægscealdes hleo / wand ofer wolcnum', 79b–80a). The poet then goes even further in his metaphorical dilation, likening the day-shield to the sail of a ship and thus (by an extension of metaphorical logic) the Hebrews to mariners or seafarers: the poet says that God had covered the sun with a sail ('segle', 81b), but men could not see the mast ropes or the sail mast ('mæstrapas', 82a; 'seglrode', 83a); the Hebrews are therefore 'sailors' ('sæmen', 105b; 'flotan', 133a). And then, rapidly shifting the image once more, the poet adds that no one could understand 'how the greatest of tents [i.e., the cloud/net/shield/sail/and now tent] was secured' ('hu afæstnod wæs feldhusa mæst', 85), the cloth of a sail apparently evoking the image of a vast tent. The poet then

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21 Citations here are based on Krapp (ed.), *Junius Manuscript*, pp. 91–107, with consultation of the many editions and textual studies of the poem.

22 See Frank, 'What Kind of Poetry is *Exodus*?'

returns to the sail image, describing the cloud as 'holy sails, a bright sky wonder' ('halige seglas, / lyftwundor leoht', 89b–90a). The poet finally rests from this breathless flight of metaphor, returning closer to the source text with a summary statement that both fire and cloud – 'two pillars in the bright sky' ('in beorhtrodor, beamas twegen', 94) – led them through the desert. This highly metaphoric, non-representational mode can be found elsewhere in Old English verse; it is a rapid-fire kaleidoscope of metaphor, a constantly shifting vision that highlights the artifice and power of verse itself, demanding much from the reader or auditor.

The pillar of fire at night ('columna ignis') is also amplified by the poet in a similar fashion. It is a 'heavenly sign', a 'wondrous marvel', a 'burning pillar' ('Heofonbeacen', 'syllic wundor', 'byrnende beam', 107b–10a), and a 'candle of heaven' ('heofoncandel', 115b); it is a 'new night guardian' ('Niwe nihtweard'), compelled to watch over the host ('nyde sceolde / wician ofer weredum', 116–17a). Compelled to guard against what dangers? Not, apparently, the Egyptians, who have not yet appeared in pursuit. It is rather the landscape itself that is the potential enemy: the pillar must guard the Hebrews on their journey

> þy læs him westengryre,
> har hæðbroga, holmegum wederum
> on ferclamme ferhð getwæfde. (117b–19)

[lest the terror of the desert, the grey heath-terror, should end their lives with a sudden clutch in the sea-tossed tempest.]

Like the divinely tamed wild animals of hagiography, the natural elements of the desert – the fire and cloud – are wrenched from their usual (potentially) harmful nature and made to shield the Hebrews travelling under God's protection. Thus the pillar, the 'forerunner' ('foregenga', 120a) or 'banner' ('segn', 127a) leading the host, seems to be a natural force barely held in check: it is compelled by necessity ('nyde') to serve as a protector and seems to be there to intimidate and discipline the Hebrews as much as to protect them:

> bellegsan hweop
> in þam hereþreate, hatan lige,
> þæt he on westenne werod forbærnde,
> nymðe hie modhwate Moyses hyrde. (121b–4)

[It threatened that war-band (i.e., the Hebrews) with the terror of fire, with hot flame: it would incinerate the host in the desert unless the brave men obeyed Moses.]

Similarly, at the climax of the poem, the waves of the Red Sea threaten the safety of the Hebrews even as they engulf the Egyptians: in the midst of a baroque passage describing the destruction of the Egyptians, the poet tells us that 'the bursting sea threatened the journey of the seamen with the terror of blood' ('brim berstende blodegesan hweop, / sæmanna sið', 478–9a). These passages are connected through similar phrasing: compare 'bellegesan hweop' to 'blodegesan hweop'. Just as the poetry seems to be an elusive, barely restrained torrent of metaphorical force, so too the pillars are barely restrained instruments of God's power.

There is an analogy to be drawn between the poetry of *Exodus* – exemplified by the rapidly changing, clashing metaphorical descriptions of the pillars of cloud and fire – and the dangerous, barely restrained force of the divine. God himself, like the fire and cloud that are extensions of his power, is a mighty awe-inspiring force whose power is swift and balanced on the edge of restraint. God's allegiance to the Hebrews is not without conditions – obedience to the laws and judgements of God sent through Moses. In this poetic rendition of vernacular theology the metaphoric power of the poetry delivers a view of the divine as a protean, elemental force, one demanding absolute allegiance and belief. The metaphorical complexity of *Exodus*, in its unpredictable delight in metaphor, thus represents the divine as an enigmatic, inscrutable and unpredictable force. The poem's dazzling use of metaphor leads to such imaginative variety that the expressed content seems to also 'wander off' into an almost free-form imaginative vernacular theology.

The Fourth Age

According to Bede, the Fourth Age begins with the ascension of the tribe of Judah to the throne of Israel and runs from David to the Babylonian exile.[23] Not much extant poetry directly treats the events of this Age of the world, but the Psalms were traditionally understood to have been authored by King David, called by Ælfric the 'worthy psalm-writer' ('se deorwurða sealm-wirhta'),[24] and were translated into Old English poetry and prose. It is certain that, as poetry, the Psalms influenced the Anglo-Saxon understanding of what religious poetry might be. In some cases, translation of the Psalms into Old English poetry moves beyond any simple concept of translation into something richer and more expansive. A particularly understudied poetic

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23 Bede, *De temporum ratione*, LXVI.81, 5 (trans. *Reckoning of Time*, pp. 171–2, 158); Ælfric, *Libellus*, lines 280–1.

24 Ælfric, *Libellus*, line 271; see also lines 273–9, 291–5.

composition of this sort is the so-called *Kentish Psalm 50*.[25] This poem is found in London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian D. vi, a late tenth-century manuscript from Canterbury. The poem is a translation, adaptation and meditation based on Psalm 50, a Psalm that was a penitential prayer in the early Church and used as a penitential formula in the liturgy.[26] Latin verses from the Psalm (some whole, some incomplete) are inserted into the text prior to the corresponding Old English verses. The Latin verses are written as rubrics, in red ink, with the Old English text interspersed in black ink. The Latin verses are complete through to verse 5, but from there to the end (verse 21) they are truncated, left as phrases only. In other words we have a complete Old English poetic composition interspersed with fragments of corresponding Latin Psalm verses; the implication is that the scribe imagined his readers would know the whole Psalm text from memory and be able to recognize the vernacular composition as an extended translation and adaptation of the source text.[27] Lines 1–30 of the Old English poem comprise a prologue that expands the details of the Latin verses 1–2 ('Unto the end, a psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him after he had sinned with Bethsabee'). The poem then translates and expands each verse of the Psalm (lines 31–145) and ends with a thirteen-line original epilogue. So to call this a simple translation would be incorrect: quite a bit of this poem is original composition and, like a poem by Donne or Herbert, it is a meditation and original devotional composition based upon a scriptural source. In this sense, the vernacular text, as a form of commentary, ultimately displaces the authoritative Latin text it purportedly serves.[28]

The prologue and epilogue of the poem establish the composition as belonging to the Fourth Age; the poet expands on the connection of the composition to David. As we shall see, the poetic construction of David's character in the poem is an integral part of its penitential meditative mode. The Old English poem begins with David:

> Dauid wæs haten   diormod hæleð,
> Israela bræga,   æðelæ and rice,
> cyninga cynost,   Criste liofost.
> (1–3)

[There was a leader of the Israelites, a bold warrior named David, noble and powerful, the bravest of kings, most beloved of Christ.]

25 Citations are from Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, pp. 88–94. See also Keefer, *Psalm-Poem*.
26 Keefer, *Psalm-Poem*, p. 15.
27 See Keefer, 'Respect for the Book', p. 29.
28 See Copeland, *Rhetoric*, p. 4.

David is mentioned twice more by name in the prologue (9b, 27a) and then once again in the epilogue (147a) for a total of four times. The prologue emphasizes his fame as a singer or poet: we are told 'he was the greatest of harpers ever known among the people' ('Wæs he under hiofenum hearpera mærost / ðara we an folcum gefrigen hæbben', 4–5); he was a most pious poet ('sangere soðfæstest', 6a) and very skilled ('swiðe geðancol') in interceding for his people with God (6b–8). As the poet constructs David's character he also emphasizes his fame in battle and his royalty: as quoted above, David is a 'bold warrior', 'noble and powerful' ('diormod hæleð', 'æðelæ and rice'); he is a 'leader' ('bræga', 2a; 'fruma', 20a), the lord of his people ('þioda aldor', 26b); he is a true champion in battle ('æt wige / soð sigecempa', 9b–10a), a very bold man and a wise leader ('searocyne man, / casere creaftig') when there was a clash of banners in days of strife ('þonne cumbulgebrec / on gewinndagum weorðan scoldan', 9b–12). David also has a close relationship with God: he is dearest to Christ ('Criste liofost', 3b), the servant of God ('se dryhtnes ðiowa', 9a); he is a god-fearing man ('godferht', 14a). Clearly the imaginative poetic strategy here is to 'frame' the Psalm poem by means of a character and give that character an arc of development, one analogous to the movement from sin to repentance and absolution demanded of the reader / auditor in the poem itself.[29] Notwithstanding his great might as a king, his special relationship with God, and his poetic fame, David nevertheless succumbed to the sinful thoughts of the body ('þurh lichaman lene geðohtas', 15), as, the poet ruefully suggests, so often happens ('swa ful oft gedeð', 13b).

A complementary movement of the poem is an emphasis on meditative inward states. David has external markers of glory – royal rule, success in battle, public skill in song – but this must now, in the poem, be matched by corresponding inner perfection. In the prologue the poet tells us that God sent a prophet (Nathan) to the king to make known to David himself ('selfum', 18b) the judgements of God concerning his sinful deeds ('ymb his womdeda waldendes doom', 19) and to let the king know he was 'guilty in his life' ('his feores sceldig', 20b). Thus there is an emphasis on David's fall as his own fault, something personal to himself ('selfum', 18b); he brought the anger of God upon himself 'through his own deeds' ('þurh his selfes weorc', 25a); he 'himself opened' (or revealed; 'selfa ontende', 28b) 'his hoard of sins' ('his synna hord', 28a) when he 'eagerly confessed his sins to God' ('gyltas georne

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29 Keefer notes that the prologue 'gives dramatic immediacy to the setting of the psalm, creating a "character" of the penitent king, with whom any reciter of psalm 50 might readily identify' (*Psalm-Poem*, p. 15).

gode andhette', 29). Likewise, in the epilogue he is 'mindful of his deeds' ('deda gemyndig', 147b); he prayed with humility 'in his inward thought' ('ingeþance', 152b) and 'in his spirit' ('on ferðe', 153a). He atoned for his 'hoard of evil crimes' ('balaniða hord', 151b) 'with a humble inner mind' ('mid eaðmede ingeþance', 152). The connection between David and the speaker/reader is clear when in the last sentence of the poem the speaker asks God to grant 'that we ever overcome (our) store of sins' ('þæt we synna hord simle oferwinnan', 155), the same phrase ('synna hord') used of David in the prologue.

This dilated emphasis on inner states and meditation resides not just in the prologue/epilogue frame, but also in the main body of the poem, the adaptation of the Psalm itself. Following the prompting of the Psalm, the speaker asks God to give him a clean heart ('clæne hiortan', 88b, rendering 'cor mundum') and an upright spirit ('modswiðne geðanc', 89b, rendering 'spiritum rectum'). The poet then goes beyond the source verse, asking God to renew a righteous spirit ('rihtne gast', 92a) in his soul ('in ferðe minum', 93a). He also later asks God to strengthen His spirit within him (101–2). The Psalm text implores God to free the speaker from blood ('Libera me de sanguinibus'); the poet renders this as 'Befreo me an ferðe, fæder mancynnes, / fram blodgete and bealaniðum' ('Free me in spirit, father of mankind, from bloodshed and wickedness', 110–11), adding several details, including 'an ferðe' [in spirit] and varying 'sanguinibus' with a typical Old English poetic doublet ('fram blodgete and bealaniðum'). The Psalm text tells us that God will not despise a humble and contrite heart ('Cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicies'); the poet expands this as well, adding the detail that God will not despise one who is 'humbled in inward thoughts' ('geeadmeded ingeþancum', 128). So it is apparent that the poetic expansions in *Kentish Psalm 50* are centred on inward states and internal penitence.

All of the Psalms have an implicit application to the reader; the first-person speaker becomes the reader/reciter, in a way common to all lyric poetry. Yet the lyric effect in this poem, its imaginative vernacular theology, is more complex. On the one hand there is a fictional frame that dislocates the analogy between the speaker of the Psalm and the Anglo-Saxon reader/auditor: the beginning of the poem clearly sets the composition as David's, the king who spoke 'thus in these words' ('ðus wordum spæc', 30b); the poem provides its own historical context, one anchored in the past of the Fourth Age. However, the dilations of the lyric speaker upon the Psalm verses in the main portion of the poem, and the shared key words in the third-person prologue and epilogue and in the first-person Psalm section, seem to draw the analogy between

David and the Anglo-Saxon reader more closely together. The poem fuses a historiographic expression of belief (the ascription of the poem to David and the development of his 'character') with an affective expression of lyric penitential belief (the poem's emphasis on inner states).

In *Kentish Psalm 50* we have an example of religious devotional or meditative verse. Many other sorts of poems could be put into this category, from lesser-known and lesser-studied poems such as *Prayer* to canonical works such as *The Dream of the Rood*. *Kentish Psalm 50* confronts personal belief and the personal relationship to God, yet it does so through creative techniques: by historicizing the Psalm source, creating a proxy for the speaker in David, and then augmenting the exploration of David's inward state. This relative creative freedom of vernacular poetry is a way for early medieval piety to explore the intimate personal self and simulate a confessional sensibility through the medium of a speaking, poetic fiction.

The Fifth Age

The beginning of The Fifth Age is marked by the fall of Israel: the sack of Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, the destruction of Solomon's Temple, and the exile of the Hebrews to Babylon. According to Bede the Fifth Age commences 'after the extinction of the kingdom of Judah' ('ab exterminio regni Iudaici') and runs from the Babylonian exile until the coming of Christ.[30] The third poem in the Junius manuscript, *Daniel*, sits astride this watershed moment of the Fifth Age's inception.[31] Like *Exodus*, *Daniel* is a free, selective adaptation of a biblical source: the Book of Daniel (chapters 1–4, ending with the feast of Belshazzar). The first seventy-eight lines of *Daniel* narrate the fall of Jerusalem at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. The rest of the poem's extant 764 lines generally detail the drama and dissent of the exiles in Babylon under their tyrannical heathen ruler. *Daniel* combines elements of biblical paraphrase with exegetical learning, lyric, hagiography, dream vision and more in a unique amalgam. Like the poets of *Genesis* and *Exodus*, the *Daniel* poet rings vernacular changes upon scriptural source material. I focus here on one simple but significant narrative addition: the poetic prologue. The *Daniel* poet has composed a (more or less) original seventy-eight-line prologue that frames the main action before the poem begins to follow its main scriptural source. *Daniel*'s prologue reveals an interest in political power,

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30 Bede, *De temporum ratione*, LXVI.143, 6 (trans. *Reckoning of Time*, pp. 179, 158); Ælfric, *Libellus*, lines 343–6.

31 Citations are from Krapp (ed.), *Junius Manuscript*, pp. 111–32.

and, as an overall poetic statement, the poem creates a sense of religious belief deeply connected to questions of politics.

The initial lines of an Old English poem often declare its main subject. In this case, the subject is the fall of the Hebrews:

> Gefrægn ic Hebreos   eadge lifgean
> in Hierusalem,   goldhord dælan,
> cyningdom habban . . .   (1–3a)

[I heard that the Hebrews lived happily in Jerusalem, they distributed a gold-hoard and possessed a kingdom . . .]

The speaker then explains that this worldly success was natural or appropriate ('gecynde', 3b) for them, and we learn in the second part of the opening sentence the identity of the divine power that has enabled this happiness: through the power of God ('þurh metodes mægen', 4a) a 'force, a host of warriors' ('wig', 'wigena mænieo', 5) was given into the hand of Moses and they left Egypt in a 'great force' ('mægene micle', 7a). Three elements are highlighted in these opening lines: the earthly power of the Hebrews, their 'cyningdom'; the power of God; and the intermediary figure of Moses, the bridge between these two powers, earthly and divine. The 'mægen' of God (4a) is connected to the 'mægen' of the Hebrews (7a), this connection reinforced by the wordplay on the 'mænieo' of line 5b. The next lines of the prologue establish that the link between divine power and earthly/political power is contingent: 'as long as they were allowed to rule in the kingdom, to command their strongholds, prosperity was bright for them' ('Þenden hie þy rice rædan moston, / burgum wealdan, wæs him beorht wela', 8–9). The poet then immediately restates this contingency in a syntactically parallel fashion, with another 'þenden' clause:

> Þenden þæt folc mid him   hiera fæder wære
> healdan woldon,   wæs him hyrde god,
> heofonrices weard,   halig drihten,
> wuldres waldend.   (10–13a)

[As long as the people would preserve the covenant of their father, God was as a protector to them, the Ward of the heavenly kingdom, the Holy Lord, the Lord of Glory.]

'Wær' denotes the covenant with God and is the key term that links divine and earthly power. The Hebrews break this pact in a fall from grace that recalls so many previous entropic moments in sacred history: the fall of the Angels, the Fall of Man, Cain and Abel, the Curse of Ham, the Tower of Babel, and so

forth. The poet tells us that God gave the Hebrews 'mod and miht' (14a) against their political enemies, but then pride ('wlenco', 17a) overcame them and they forsook the 'skills of the law', 'the power of the Lord' ('æcræftas', 19a; 'metodes *mægen*scipe', 20a, emphasis added). Here we find 'mægen' again (in a compound), echoing its occurrences in the beginning of the poem; it is a term of contingent flexible power, something granted and revoked. The narrator then, with a pause, pushes ahead in the prologue with an *ic geseah* formula (22a). He saw 'that company, the race of Israelites, turn to error, do wrong, work sins' ('þa gedriht in gedwolan hweorfan, / Israhela cyn unriht don, / wommas wyrcean', 22–4a). This is all a reference to the turning away of the Hebrews to the worship of false gods, a source of tension throughout the poem, and a way of setting up the drama between earthly and divine power. The prologue then summarizes how the Lord became angry and brought the Babylonians down upon Jerusalem as an instrument of his wrath. As the enemy forces gather in the prologue, the poet again reminds us of the contingent pact between man and God (55–6) before a quick description of the destruction and plunder of the Temple. The Hebrews and their treasures are led into slavery ('to weorcþeowum', 74b), an utter absence of political power or 'mægen'. At this point, the prologue over, the poet begins to follow the main source in the Book of Daniel more closely.

In this prologue the poet has created a frame for the main action of the poem. This frame constitutes a mini-drama concerning the logic of retribution and the way power operates: power originates with God, is mobilized in contractual terms as earthly political power and is thus predicated upon divine power; nevertheless, power is contingent and mobile, and reverts back to God under the proper transgressive circumstances. The resulting theology of the poem, in other words, seems rather this-worldly and pragmatic, centred on the source of power and its just or unjust administration. We can also see this political focus throughout the poem: in the tyranny of Nebuchadnezzar; in the emphasis on royal counsel (of the Babylonian counsellors and Daniel); in the debasement of Nebuchadnezzar; in the *translatio imperii* from Babylon to Persia; in the prophetic dreams of Nebuchadnezzar (dreams of the rise and fall of empire); in the political/religious dissent of the Hebrews, when confronted with false gods; in the superior power of God trumping Nebuchadnezzar's order to incinerate the Hebrew youths. The inset 'Song of Azarias' and the 'Song of the Three Youths' are essentially hymns to God's power. The poet even invents a character, an unnamed counsellor ('cyninges raeswa', 416b), whose speech is an endorsement of God's power over earthly kings. As a poetic expression of vernacular theology, *Daniel* is an inquiry into the theology

of political power; the Old English poem reshapes its unwieldy source material into an exploration of the origins and nature of power, both earthly and divine. As the poem explores power, it simultaneously explores belief and fundamental questions concerning the rise and fall of political communities.

The Sixth Age

The Sixth Age begins with the birth of Christ; it is, for the men and women of the early Middle Ages, the time of the present, the age 'which is now in progress . . . is not fixed according to any sequence of generations or times, but will come to an end in the death of the whole world' ('que nunc agitur . . . nulla generationum uel temporum serie certa, sed ut aetas decrepita ipsa totius saeculi morte consumenda').[32] The birth of Christ is the great central moment of Christian salvation history, the moment that all the prior moments of salvation history had foreshadowed *in figura*. There is no shortage of Old English poetry that treats the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ. The first three poems of the Exeter Book give us three distinct stages in the life of Christ: Advent (*Christ I*), the Ascension (Cynewulf's *Christ II*), Final Judgement (*Christ III*).[33] Far more poems could be cited as belonging to the Sixth Age and Christ's incarnation: *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Harrowing of Hell*, *Christ and Satan*, other Judgement Day poems, and so forth.

Christ I is a series of reflective poems composed in response to the Latin antiphons of Advent. The Latin antiphons are not included in the manuscript of the Old English poems, and the Old English lyrics are run together in the manuscript, with only occasional indicators that one poem ends and another begins. *Christ I* is one poem and it is also twelve poems. At several points across this complex structure, the *Christ I* poet conjures up the figure of the Virgin Mary, like the repetition of a musical motif. By focusing on the representation of Mary in *Christ I*, we can see how these lyrics embody a poetic vernacular theology. For obvious reasons, doubt accompanies the concept of the virgin birth; as an expression of belief, the vernacular rendering of this doctrine thus wrestles with disbelief. The poem handles this through characterization and dialogue, dramatizing the dialectic of belief and disbelief. We will proceed in sequence, as *Christ I* unfolds in twelve lyric parts.

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32 Bede, *De temporum ratione*, LXVI.7 (trans. *Reckoning of Time*, p. 158); Ælfric, *Libellus*, lines 343–6.

33 Citations are of Krapp and Dobbie (eds.), *Exeter Book*, pp. 3–49, which edits all three poems as one poem (*Christ*) with three divisions.

Mary first appears in *Lyric II* (*Christ I*, 18–49); the first half of the lyric develops an image of humanity waiting in prison ('in carcerne', 25b) for the coming of Christ. The second half of the lyric then introduces, without naming her, the young virgin who was chosen as Christ's mother. The poet tells us that the conception 'was accomplished without a man's embrace' ('þæt wæs geworden butan weres frigum', 37) and that this was unprecedented, a secret ('degol', 41a), a mystery of the Lord ('dryhtnes geryne', 41b). The thorny subject is not taken further at this point, only raised as an enigma.

Mary then reappears in *Lyric IV* (*Christ I*, 71–103), an adaptation of the antiphon 'O virgo virginum': 'O Virgin of virgins, how shall this come about? For one like you has never been seen before, nor will there be a successor. O daughters of Jerusalem, why are you amazed by my situation? The mystery which you perceive is divine in nature.' The poet takes up the incipient drama of this antiphon and gives half the lyric to the 'daughters of Jerusalem' who question Mary, and the other half to the Virgin herself, who answers them. The citizens ask her to 'expound the mystery' ('arece . . . þæt geryne', 74a), how she became pregnant and conceived a child and did not know 'intercourse' ('gebedscipe', 76b). The lyric spends four and a half lines marvelling at this event, a wonder that had never been heard of 'in days gone by' ('in ærdagum', (79a) and would never happen again 'in the future' ('toweard in tide', 82a). The second half of the lyric (87b–103) is Mary's reply, introduced as direct discourse (87b–8). Mary asks what this 'spectacle' ('wundrung', 89a) is that they marvel at; why do they ask 'out of curiosity' ('þurh fyrwet', 92a) how she retained her virginity yet became a mother? The virgin closes off any possibility of humans understanding such a mystery: 'To mankind, however, knowledge of this mystery is not given' ('Forþan þæt monnum nis / cuð geryne', 94b–5a). She then simply concludes with the blunt result: the sin of Eve has been redeemed (96–9a). Thus after raising the virgin birth 'problem' in *Lyric II*, *Lyric IV* moves the subject to a dialogic structure, question and answer, with Mary herself as a character. In the course of this dialogue the mystery of the doctrine is asserted, but any 'explanation' is attenuated.

Mary appears again in *Lyric VII* (*Christ I*, 164–213), an adaptation of the antiphon 'O Joseph, quomodo': 'O Joseph why did you believe what before you feared? Why indeed? The One whom Gabriel announced would be coming, Christ, is begotten in her by the Holy Spirit.' Here the poet has proceeded even further in dramatizing the material and the entire lyric is a dialogue between Mary and Joseph. Inspired by apocrypha such as the *Protoevangelium* of James, the lyric uses as its setting or rhetorical situation

the rejection of Mary by Joseph due to her pregnancy. Joseph is the proto-
typical doubter, a proxy for the believer troubled by the spectre of disbelief. In
the first part of the lyric Mary laments that Joseph must cast off her love and
that as a result she is 'deeply grieved, deprived of honour' ('deope gedrefed,
dome bereafod', 168). She has endured many words of reproach (170); sad in
spirit ('geomormod', 173a), she must weep. The end of her speech seeks
comfort, resolving that God can easily 'heal her heart's sorrow' ('gehælan
hygesorge', 174a) and 'comfort the desolate' ('afrefran feasceaftne', 175a). The
poet plays upon the incipient drama of the rhetorical situation by highlighting
the emotion of the lyrical moment, developing Mary as a lyric speaker. In a
departure from the antiphon source, Joseph makes an emotional and per-
plexed reply (175b–95a). He asks why she mourns and cries, and explains that
he has found no fault or sin in her, yet she speaks as if she is 'filled with sins'
('firena gefylled', 181a). He laments that he has 'received too much of evil from
this pregnancy' ('to fela hæbbe / þæs byrdscypes bealwa onfongen', 181a–2),
and has no way to refute the 'hostile speech' ('laþan spræce', 183b) directed at
him by his enemies. He puzzles that he began with a pure woman as a wife;
that has 'changed' ('gehwyrfed', 188b) and he does not know the cause (189a).
The end of his speech details his intolerable position. It does him no good to
speak or to keep silent (189b–90a), because if he speaks the truth, Mary will be
stoned; if he conceals her shame, he will be a 'perjurer' ('manswara', 193b),
hated everywhere. The third movement of the lyric gives us the resolution to
this drama and the final speech of Mary, introduced by the poet in a formal
summary sentence: 'Then the woman revealed the true mystery and thus
spoke' ('þa seo fæmne onwrah / ryhtgeryno, ond þus reordade', 195b–6).
Mary's speech in this final section dramatizes the second part of the antiphon
as direct discourse. She explains that the truth is that she has not known any
man; rather, the angel Gabriel came to her and announced she was to bear the
son of God. She commands Joseph to dismiss his awful anxiety ('forlæt /
sare sorgceare', 208b–9a) and give thanks to God that she is God's mother and he,
Joseph, is His father 'by the world's reckoning' ('woruldcund bi wene', 212a).
As *Christ I* proceeds through its lyric sections, these moments of Marian
disbelief create an ongoing dramatic counterpoint to the believing joy of
Advent.

Lyric IX (*Christ I*, 275–347), also, is a Marian lyric, with an elaborate metaphor
about Mary as the door through which Christ entered the earth. The final
poem, *Lyric XII* (*Christ I*, 416–39), also returns to Mary in a generalized praise of
the wonder that Christ came to save men not through a 'seed of man' ('sæd . . .
monnes', 420a–1a), but through a greater craft than any mortal man could

know or learn in that 'mystery' ('geryne', 421b–3a). The dramatization of the Mariological 'subplot' of *Christ I* has ramifications for the text as a poetic experience and as an expression of belief. As Edward B. Irving, Jr, notes, any dramatic dialogue in a work such as this 'always has the immediacy of a voice heard'.[34] I would suggest that by placing the mystery of the virgin birth in amplified dialogue form, *Christ I* represents the dilemma of belief and supplemental disbelief in a way deeply connected to the reader/auditor. The immediacy of dramatic dialogue inserts the reader directly into the negotiation of doubt; belief is asserted as a 'mystery' ('geryne') and no more explanation is needed; however, that mystery comes with attendant doubt and the dialogue itself enacts this supplemental disbelief.

The six ages of the world and its teleology of salvation history are a construct based in the cultural authority of Latin learning; it stands as an expression of the totalizing ideology of Christian thought: that all of human history is understandable as a schema, a plan, and that the human presence is no more than a part of that plan. Yet, by placing vernacular religious poetry in counterpoint to sacred history in this essay, we see the play or possibility of difference within the Six Ages ideology. In so many ways, the specificity of the vernacular poetic expression of doctrine constitutes a moving, potential voice of difference in the face of Christian ideology: to be sure, the vernacular poem expresses belief, yet its very status *as* vernacular poetry challenges the 'symbolic order of continuity' by 'embodying the inevitability of historical difference'.[35] It is easy to be blinded by the conventionality of early medieval religious poetry in the vernacular: its lack of 'originality', its dependence on Latin sources, its general monastic orientation, its firm place in various 'Christianities' of the early Middle Ages. In this light, such poetry can seem a minor, curious phenomenon. But to see vernacular religious poetry of the early Middle Ages in a fresh light, we might do well to remember the miraculous strangeness of it: its ever-doomed ambition, marked by complexity and ambiguity, to fully apprehend and express the sacred mysteries, and the way its joy in new words forms an expression of living belief.

34 Irving, Jr, 'Advent of Poetry'.
35 Copeland, *Rhetoric*, p. 106.

Chapter 17

Performing Christianity: liturgical and devotional writing

CHRISTOPHER A. JONES

Modern views of Anglo-Saxon religious writing are drawn to its perceived summits: biblical and hagiographic verse, prose translations of Scripture and the abundant sermons and homilies.[1] Such views can distort, however, by isolating landmarks from their surrounding terrain. This chapter concerns two parts of that terrain, still only vaguely mapped: liturgical writings that directed, or aspired to direct, Christian public worship, and devotional prayers. Existing literary histories offer useful, if partial, coverage of primary texts attributed to either category.[2] No definitive handlist has yet been compiled, partly because the phenomena of 'liturgy' and 'devotion' resist our taxonomies, and a historical perspective on the meaning of that resistance ought to precede the analysis of relevant texts.

The goal of this essay is therefore not a new inventory so much as a new focus on the enmeshment of liturgy, devotion and literary invention seen, in various forms, across a selection of writings from England between *c.* 800 and *c.* 1100.[3] In its first two parts, the chapter considers examples of liturgical and devotional composition, in Latin and Old English, which bear witness to the sheer productivity of those forms and to the complexity of their interactions. The latter half of the essay seeks to apply the lessons of the former to some more ambiguous cases, first to so-called liturgical poetry in Old English, then, briefly, to a few better-known Old English poems in which modern critics find 'liturgical' or 'devotional' symptoms. The chapter concludes with questions for future research, encouraging a more nuanced integration of literary history with these two fundamental expressions of medieval Christianity.

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1 Thanks to Leslie Lockett for her helpful suggestions on earlier drafts of this chapter.
2 A good overview (though defining 'liturgical and devotional' very broadly) is Fulk and Cain, *History of Old English Literature*, pp. 120–47.
3 In this respect my approach is indebted to Holsinger, 'Liturgy'.

Liturgical prayer and *ordines*

Liturgy is often defined as the public, communal services of Christian worship, involving clergy and a co-ordinated use of set texts (spoken or sung), gestures and sacred objects (altars, vessels, Gospel books, holy oils or water, vestments, reliquaries, etc.). The medieval West did not actually employ the Latin term *liturgia* in this sense but tended to speak of *officia ecclesiastica* or *divina* – a usage that suggests a more capacious understanding of 'public' religious duty (*officium*) than its modern equivalents.[4]

From the period of conversion through the eleventh century, most *officia ecclesiastica* observed by Anglo-Saxon Christians followed ancient forms imported variously from Ireland, Gaul, Italy and, eventually, the Carolingian and Ottonian Churches. The transmission of Latin materials for the mass and divine office (or liturgy of the hours) involved many channels for which direct evidence, in the form of liturgical texts, is often fragmentary or non-existent from the period before the tenth century.[5] What evidence there is suggests that, within broadly stable structures for the mass and office, diversity reigned in many details of Anglo-Saxon worship, and received liturgies were constantly changing to suit local needs or tastes. The same would, of course, be true for all of medieval Europe at the time, but as these patterns unfolded in Anglo-Saxon England they produced two effects of literary-historical note.

The first of these effects has remained underappreciated to the degree that, until recently, modern study of Anglo-Saxon literature privileged Old English over Latin. When considered at all, Latin liturgical texts have served historians and source-hunters, but rarely (apart from hagiographical narratives) have they claimed attention in their own right as literary productions. (By 'liturgical texts' are meant texts to be spoken or chanted in services, but also the often lengthy instructions that, alone or in combination with those texts, constituted the *ordo* of a given ritual.) Certainly, the improvement of received liturgical texts as well as the composition of new ones ranked among the more valued applications of literacy in the period, especially in monastic and clerical communities.[6]

The Anglo-Saxons' achievements in this domain are hardly unique but do stand out where two particular subgenres are concerned. These two were,

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4 See Eisenhofer, *Handbuch der katholischen Liturgik*, vol. I, pp. 4–6; and Cabrol, 'Liturgie'. For introductions to the structure and terminology of medieval liturgy, see Harper, *Forms and Orders*; also Palazzo, *History of Liturgical Books*.

5 For a recent account, see Pfaff, *Liturgy in Medieval England*, pp. 30–156.

6 See, e.g., Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, pp. 236–44; and Flynn, *Medieval Music*, p. 48.

from the late tenth century onwards, cultivated with particular skill at the cathedral of Winchester, which had recently been monasticized by Bishop Æthelwold (963–84). The better known of these compositions include tropes, sequences and proses – three major types of embellishment of the received chants for the mass – found in the Winchester Troper. The Winchester Troper actually refers to two manuscripts, both written at the cathedral (the Old Minster): Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 473 (saec. xi[in]), and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 775 (saec. xi[med.]). Along with the many items of continental origin in the collection occur numerous new compositions, some of them probably by Wulfstan the Cantor, precentor of the cathedral and the most accomplished Anglo-Latin poet of his time.[7] I will return to the composition of tropes and discuss an example in the latter half of this essay, since their form offers a recognized parallel to kinds of liturgical poetry in Old English.

No less striking than such contributions to the mass-chant repertory is the pattern of almost obsessive rewriting of pontifical liturgies (ceremonies reserved to bishops alone) recorded in English liturgical books of the later tenth through early twelfth centuries. Comparative studies of various pontifical ceremonies – the mass for consecrating the holy oils of Maundy Thursday, for instance, or rituals of public penance in Lent – have revealed a striking degree of innovation in the structure and euchology (the content and forms of prayers) for those services.[8] A better-known outlet of the same creative energy was the collecting and composing of episcopal benedictions (variable blessings delivered by a bishop before communion in the mass). While the Anglo-Saxons received the bulk of these blessings from two different continental traditions, the manuscripts into which the texts were gathered (known as benedictionals) survive in remarkable numbers from later tenth- and eleventh-century England. In this, Æthelwold's cathedral emerges once again as instrumental in promoting a (possibly) new liturgical fashion, so much so that modern scholarship has identified his core collection of these blessings as the 'Winchester-type' benedictional.[9]

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7 On the manuscripts and Wulfstan the Cantor's possible contributions, see Lapidge and Winterbottom (eds. and trans.), *Life of St Æthelwold*, pp. xxx–xxxix; Lapidge (ed.), *Cult of St Swithun*, p. 339; and Rankin, 'Making the Liturgy'. For an edition of the repertory, see Frere (ed.), *Winchester Troper*.

8 C. A. Jones, 'Origins of the "Sarum" Chrism Mass'; Hamilton, 'Rites for Public Penance'.

9 See Prescott, 'Structure of English Pre-Conquest Benedictionals', and 'Text of the Benedictional of St Æthelwold'. For the manuscripts, see Pfaff and Nelson, 'Pontificals and Benedictionals'. Dumville, *Liturgy*, pp. 84–5, notes evidence for a pre-Æthelwoldian origin of the 'Winchester' benedictional.

The Latin of the benedictions frequently employs elaborate diction with rhyming prose and other rhetorical patterning.[10] Already highly stylized, many benedictions were rewritten in the course of their early English transmission, if not replaced by altogether new, more polished compositions. No obvious ritual or theological concerns required this fussing over the benedictional texts. It is reasonable to see the trend as a sign of peculiar English enthusiasm for the form, and perhaps as a means to showcase literary talent in communities that produced the major collections (Winchester, Canterbury, Worcester and Exeter). To illustrate how fastidious the revisions could be, consider two successive versions of the blessing for the feast of St Æthelthryth (23 June). This blessing was almost certainly composed at Winchester under Æthelwold's direction, and its first section (out of three total) displays a typical style:

> Omnipotens unus et aeternus Deus, pater et filius et spiritus sanctus, qui beatae Æðelðryðe animum septiformis gratiae ubertate ita succensum solidauit, ut duorum coniugum thalamis asscita immunis euaderet castamque sibi piissimus sponsam perpetim adoptaret, uos ab incentiua libidinum concupiscentia muniendo submoueat et sui amoris igne succendat. Amen.

> [May almighty God, one and eternal, Father and Son and Holy Ghost, who set alight and strengthened the conviction of St Æthelthryth with the bounty of sevenfold grace so that, summoned to the bridal chambers of two husbands, she was able to escape scot-free and that the Holy Bridegroom was able to adopt her as his chaste spouse in perpetuity, remove you from the provocative concupiscence of lust and ignite you with the fire of his love. Amen.][11]

Such is the form occurring, with minor variations, in numerous English benedictionals based on the 'Winchester-type'. A manuscript from Exeter, roughly a century later, preserves a new version of the same blessing (again, I quote only the first section):

> Omnipotens Deus qui beatae uirginis Ætheldrythe animum septiformis gratiae robore solidauit. eamque de duorum coniugum thalamis inmunem sibi castam sponsam adoptauit; uos ab incentiua libidinum concupiscentia muniendo submoueat; ac uobis suae benedictionis donum clementer infundat. Amen.

10 On stylistic traits of pontifical benedictions, see Moeller (ed.), *Corpus benedictionum pontificalium*, vol. III, pp. lvii–lxv.

11 From the Benedictional of St Æthelwold (London, British Library, MS Add. 49598), as in Lapidge and Winterbottom (eds. and trans.), *Life of St Æthelwold*, p. lxxxii, with Lapidge's translation.

[May almighty God, who with the might of sevenfold grace strengthened the resolve of Saint Æthelthryth and, protecting her from the bridal beds of two husbands, adopted her as his chaste spouse, fortify and remove you from the inflaming desire of lusts, and mercifully pour out upon you the gift of his blessing. Amen.][12]

Though still recognizably indebted to its source, the revised version shows minute adjustments to even out (approximately) the length of clauses and create the medial-final rhyme ('solidauit . . . adoptauit'). The imagery also changes subtly: instead of asking God to replace the fire of lust with that of charity, the Exeter version prays that he 'pour out' ('infundat') blessing, like water to extinguish the threatening flame. While this particular blessing began as an Anglo-Saxon composition, the type of alteration seen in the Exeter version often affected older, received blessings too. Whether in benedictionals, pontificals or other books, new or revised liturgical compositions remain a largely unexploited resource for students of Anglo-Latin stylistics.

A second trend that connects liturgical and literary history has received rather more notice in previous scholarship, but its sheer extent and implications still await due recognition. I refer to the increasing use of the vernacular in and around contexts of liturgical performance. It has often been noted that the Anglo-Saxons' readiness to employ their native language for education and religion was distinctive mainly in degree. Analogous efforts in continental Germanic or Romance dialects do not begin to match the quantity and range of applications vested in the English vernacular through the eleventh century. Closer parallels to Anglo-Saxon attitudes in this regard lay in the early Irish Church, but also, significantly, in the east. There, early missions to the Goths and, later, to the Slavs had set precedents for vernacular translation of sacred texts in service to evangelism and worship.[13] It has been suggested that the same pastorally minded concession may have been planted among the Anglo-Saxons by the Greek-speaking archbishop, Theodore of Canterbury (668–90).[14]

The evidence for Old English in actual Anglo-Saxon liturgies nevertheless appears slim. What looks like a series of vernacular corporate intercessions, similar in form to 'bidding prayers' that, in some later English liturgies, would

12 London, British Library, MS Add. 28188, fol. 143ᵛ. I have in progress an edition of the complete Exeter benedictional.
13 On the Gothic missions, see E. A. Thompson, *Visigoths*, esp. chaps. 5 and 6; on the Slavs, see note 26 below.
14 For the vernaculars in other Western Churches, see McC. Gatch, 'Achievement of Ælfric', with a focus on preaching. For the possible influence of the Eastern Church, see Wormald, 'Anglo-Saxon Society and Its Literature', p. 8.

follow the Gospel reading at mass, was added in the eleventh century to the York Gospels (York, Minster Library, MS Add. 1, s. x/xi).[15] But nothing in the text confirms that these prayers served in a liturgical as opposed to some less formal setting. Such minor possible exceptions aside, surviving liturgical books reinforce the assumption that Latin prevailed as the language of Anglo-Saxon liturgical prayer and chant.[16] For rubrics and other texts accompanying the liturgy proper, however, the situation is quite different, with Old English encroaching to a significant degree. The scope of such material ranges from brief glosses and marginal notes (such as lectionary markings) to quite extensive vernacular instructions accompanying two eleventh-century liturgical compendia.[17] The first, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud misc. 482, contains *ordines*, almost entirely in English, for penance and for visitation of the sick and dying. The collection may have functioned not as an actual service-book but as an aid for training priests in two of their most solemn pastoral duties. Even if that is the case, it is hard to imagine that a clergyman would study such rituals in Old English only to translate them back into Latin when ministering to actual laypersons.[18] By contrast, the second major witness to the use of Old English for rubrics is an actual service-book, possibly for the use of a minster- or parish priest: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 422, Part 2 (the Red Book of Darley), copied *c.* 1061, possibly at the New Minster, Winchester, or at Sherborne. Its most concentrated vernacular materials occur at the rituals of judicial ordeal and in rubrics throughout the section of pastoral *officia*, including baptismal rites and the visitation of the sick.[19]

The list of examples could be extended substantially by, for example, Old English rubrics in the early eleventh-century sacramentary known as the 'Missal' of Robert of Jumièges, or by an Old English version of the royal coronation oath allegedly used in the tenth century, or by a twelfth-century

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15 Printed by W. H. Stevenson, 'Yorkshire Surveys', pp. 9–10; the description of this item as 'bidding prayers' dates only to the sixteenth century.

16 But see provocative recent challenges by Holsinger, 'Parable of Cædmon's *Hymn*', pp. 159–60, 166–70, and (for Middle English evidence) 'Liturgy', pp. 303–5.

17 The evidence is surveyed in detail by Dumville, *Liturgy*, pp. 127–32; and Gittos, 'Is There Any Evidence', pp. 75–82.

18 The rituals for anointing the sick or dying are edited by Fehr, 'Altenglische Ritualtexte'. The manuscript, Laud misc. 482, was probably copied at Worcester in the mid-eleventh century. For more details on its contents and its possible function as a teaching manual, see V. Thompson, 'Pastoral Contract', pp. 109–10, and *Dying and Death*, pp. 67–81.

19 On the origins and uneven contents of CCCC 422 (II), see most recently Gittos, 'Is There Any Evidence', pp. 66–70; on the Old English rubrics, see *ibid.*, pp. 77–9; also Page, 'Old English Liturgical Rubrics'; and Graham, 'Old English Liturgical Directions'.

vernacular formula of excommunication.[20] Substantial vernacular instructions about the liturgy survive in translations of monastic and canonical rules, monastic customaries, episcopal capitula, pastoral letters and other normative texts.[21] Previously overlooked as possible evidence of an increasing role for the vernacular in eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon liturgical settings is the so-called relic-sermon ('Reliquienpredigt') from Exeter, copied *c.* 1030. The form of this lengthy text has been compared to typical Latin inventories of relics, but its language (Old English), its narrative preamble on the history of Exeter's relic collection and its descriptive detail concerning each of 138 items all bespeak a document to be read aloud before a congregation at some formal showing of the cathedral's relics (*ostensio reliquiarum*).[22] Like Rogationtide processions, *adventus* ceremonies, excommunications, judicial ordeals and other important rituals that developed outside the frameworks of the mass and office, the *ostensio* of relics features many characteristics of a liturgy, for which the Exeter list may have served, in effect, as part of the *ordo* for that occasion.

More ambiguous examples of Old English around the liturgy will be taken up in later parts of this chapter, but they do not greatly alter the impression thus far: in service to the liturgy, the vernacular was, by the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, either assuming a greater role or receiving more open acknowledgement of a role that it had long enjoyed. Medieval and modern commentators alike have often characterized this trend as a concession to poor Latinity among clergy and religious. Bishop Æthelwold invoked such reasons to justify his translating the Benedictine Rule into Old English. Speaking, it seems, of persons who took the monastic habit late in life, Æthelwold concludes:

20 For the 'Missal' (Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale Y.6, s. xi¹), see Wilson (ed.), *Missal of Robert of Jumièges*, pp. 287–95; for the coronation oaths, see Gittos, 'Is There Any Evidence', p. 79 and note 98; for the excommunication, see Treharne, 'Unique Old English Formula'.

21 For an overview, see Fulk and Cain, *History of Old English Literature*, pp. 127–32. Pertinent primary sources include, for the Benedictine Rule, Schröer (ed.), *Angelsächsischen Prosabearbeitungen*. For the rule of Chrodegang, see Langefeld (ed. and trans.), *Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang*. For monastic customs and other pertinent regulatory texts, see references in J. Hill, 'Regularis concordia'; and Gretsch, 'Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 57'. For episcopal capitula, see Sauer (ed. and trans.), *Theodulfi capitula in England*. For pastoral letters, see esp. Ælfric, *Hirtenbriefe*.

22 The Old English list was added to Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auctarium D. 2. 16, a tenth-century Gospel book from Brittany; see Förster, 'Zur Geschichte des Reliquienkultus'. On the possible use of the text at an *ostensio* on a special feast of all relics, see *ibid.*, pp. 50–9.

Wel mæg dugan hit naht mid hwylcan gereorde mon sy gestryned 7 to þan soþan geleafan gewæmed, butan þæt an sy þæt he Gode gegange. Hæbben forþi þa ungelæreden inlendisce þæs halgan regules cyþþe þurh agenes gereordes anwrigenesse, þæt hy þe geornlicor Gode þeowien and nane tale næbben þæt hy þurh nytennesse misfon þurfen.

[It certainly cannot matter by what language a man is acquired and drawn to the true faith, as long only as he comes to God. Therefore let the unlearned natives have the knowledge of this holy rule by the exposition of their own language, that they may the more zealously serve God and have no excuse that they were driven by ignorance to err.][23]

The context of ongoing Anglo-Saxon liturgical innovation, however, casts a different light on Æthelwold's posture of indulgence, and on similar condescensions by his most famous pupil, Ælfric the homilist. Helen Gittos has rightly observed that 'The common characteristic of the instances where the vernacular is found in a liturgical context is that they are direct addresses by a priest to an individual (not necessarily a layman) in circumstances in which it is critical that [the addressee] understands what is happening.' Wide use of the vernacular was thus not a symptom of clerical ignorance but of conviction that, where these ritual functions were concerned, 'Old English was simply a perfectly normal language for writing as well as speech.'[24] Justifications from precedent were not far to seek. In its famous preface, the Alfredian translation of the *Pastoral Care* shows awareness that even the revered *linguae sacrae* had been, for some, native languages, and that Greek had known translation into Latin, just as Hebrew had into Greek.[25] That kind of historical sensitivity makes the endurance of a linguistic divide for the liturgy itself appear all the more deliberate. Along with the preface to the *Pastoral Care*, Old English prose and verse translations of the psalter were being produced in same period that witnessed, far to the east, the rise of a vernacular liturgy for the Slavs.[26] On the other hand, the seeming absence of a comparable development in England is deceptive for two reasons requiring a closer look: English devotional traditions over the same period readily embraced vernacular prayer, while the barriers between liturgy and devotion often gave way.

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23 Whitelock (ed. and trans.), 'King Edgar's Establishment', in Whitelock *et al.* (eds. and trans.), *Councils and Synods*, pp. 142–54 (at pp. 151–2, with translation). On the proposed function of this text as a preface to Æthelwold's translation of the *Rule*, see Gretsch, 'Benedictine Rule in Old English'.

24 Gittos, 'Is There Any Evidence', pp. 79–80.

25 See the preface to the Alfredian translation of Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis*: Alfred, *Pastoral Care*, vol. I, pp. 5 (line 25), 7 (lines 1–4).

26 See Dostál, 'Origins of the Slavonic Liturgy'; and, for the wider context, Tachiaos, *Cyril and Methodius of Thessalonica*, esp. pp. 42–5, 67–75, 120–5.

Private prayer and devotion

The second major category of texts addressed in this chapter, 'devotion', proves even harder to define than liturgy, which it frequently overlaps. Devotions could involve set prayers in a framework of simple or complex rituals. In most modern discussions, devotions are distinguished from liturgy by their essentially private and flexible character. But, as Jean Leclercq cautioned long ago, even those basic distinctions prove hard to maintain when we turn to the manuscript sources or try to imagine the contexts for performing prayer.[27] Was a layperson who recited her *Pater noster* during the mass performing a devotion or participating in a liturgy? Was a monk who quietly mouthed a memorized prayer in Old English, and did so alongside other monks in choir at a time designated for 'private prayer', engaged in liturgy or devotion? The point of such questions is not to provoke arid arguments over terminology but to recall that the labels are reductive, and that the same act of medieval piety could have liturgical and devotional orientations simultaneously. Our attempts to make them separate run the risk, Leclercq protested, of anachronism.

The Anglo-Saxons left an extraordinary legacy of devotional writing, especially in the form of so-called private prayers. Several important collections of such Latin prayers survive from a remarkably early date, including the so-called Royal Prayerbook (London, British Library, MS Royal 2 A. xx; s. viii²); the Book of Nunnaminster (London, British Library, MS Harley 2965; s. viii/ix); the now fragmentary Harley Prayerbook (London, British Library, MS Harley 7653; s. viii/ix); and the Book of Cerne (Cambridge, University Library, MS Ll. 1. 10; Mercian, s. ix¹).[28] Some prayers found in one or more of these early witnesses resurfaced in the later Anglo-Saxon period, appearing in similar collections such as the Galba Prayerbook (London, British Library, MS Cotton Galba A. xiv + Cotton Nero A. ii; s. xi), in the miscellany of Ælfwine, Benedictine abbot of the New Minster, Winchester (London, British Library, MS Cotton Titus D. xxvi–xxvii; s. xi¹), or as additions scattered among a variety of other manuscripts. While in some cases the reappearance of prayers in later contexts suggests a tenth-century importation anew from

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27 Leclercq, 'Culte liturgique et prière intime', esp. pp. 44–7. More recently, see A. Hughes, *Medieval Manuscripts*, p. 19; and Boynton, 'Prayer as Liturgical Performance', pp. 896–7, and '*Libelli precum*', pp. 256–7.

28 For good summaries, see Bestul, 'Prayers'; and Pulsiano, 'Prayers, Glosses and Glossaries'.

the continent, in others the possibility remains of transmission through earlier Anglo-Saxon copies.

In addition to large collections, many single prayers or small clusters appear in a variety of manuscript settings. In fact, as the most abundant type of devotional text surviving from Anglo-Saxon England, private prayers are easily taken for granted. Christ himself commended prayer in private (Matthew 6:6, Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16), and the practice was a fixture in hagiography as well as monastic rules and customaries (i.e., texts that further clarified and supplemented the Rule of St Benedict). But why *written* devotional forms were first collected, how they were used and by whom remain intractable questions.[29] Outside the contexts of liturgy (in the narrow sense), there can have been at first little perceived need for written texts, much less entire collections, to sustain private prayer. At a time when the *Pater noster*, Apostles' creed and memorized psalms sufficed the devotional needs of most, the composition of lengthy literary prayers for private or paraliturgical use, and their committal to costly vellum, call for more explanation than is often acknowledged.

A rise of 'private' devotional forms has often been seen as an accommodation of lay demands for individual, quasi-monastic regimens of prayer.[30] Recent scholarship, however, has emphasized the possible function of 'private' prayers and devotions within the religious communities whose scriptoria almost certainly produced and owned early prayerbooks.[31] So viewed, some collections of devotional prayers may say less about personal pieties and more about an emergent awareness of the authoring community's status as specially distinguished agents of prayer. Just as chastity, ownership of saints' relics and command of literacy became more and more identified with spiritual elites through the earlier Middle Ages, so too access to an increasingly rich fund of 'devotional' prayers would have complemented an elaborate office liturgy as a mark of superior intercessory ability. A compilation such as the ninth-century Book of Cerne – containing private prayers but also selections from the Gospels, a breviate psalter and an early specimen of quasi-liturgical drama – displayed concretely its community's prestigious range of resources as professional *oratores*. Whoever their original owners were, some *libelli precum*

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29 M. Brown, *Book of Cerne*, pp. 181–4, and 'Female Book Ownership'. On the challenges of recovering the intended and actual functions of written devotional prayers, see R. Fulton, 'Praying with Anselm'.

30 Black, 'Divine Office', pp. 62–6.

31 On historians' (mis)representation of these collections, see Boynton, 'Prayer as Liturgical Performance', pp. 897–901, and '*Libelli precum*', pp. 255–9.

from eighth- and early ninth-century England show traces of adaptation and influence in religious houses between the late ninth and eleventh centuries.[32]

That a 'private' prayer could also be shared property and benefit the individual *as member* of a corporate entity is just one of several complications about the category of devotion. Others arise from a blurring of liturgical and devotional practices that tended to result from efforts to institutionalize the latter. The blurring is evident in the forms of new liturgical and devotional texts themselves, which drew on common sources and exercised reciprocal influence. Alcuin, for instance, drew confidently on his experience of the divine office to prescribe rounds of devotional prayers and psalmody for private needs.[33] Boundaries would grow porous even within communal liturgies, too, as approved devotions insinuated themselves more and more into the times and places designated for the mass and office. A clear example survives from the context of mid-tenth-century Winchester at the height of Benedictine enthusiasm. Bishop Æthelwold there introduced into the divine office, already crowded with its ordinary components plus many customary accretions (including votive antiphons and extra psalmody), a set of new devotions to the Virgin, Saints Peter and Paul (patrons of the Old Minster) and All Saints. Our only direct record of this innovation is a late but credible text describing how Æthelwold 'instituted regular (supplementary) offices, unique to himself, for individual observance, and he arranged these offices in three *cursus*, and with the most modest insistence he urged those subject to him that, with this private observance, they should vigilantly resist the fiery temptations of Satan . . . and that the faith . . . remain perpetually whole and inviolate'.[34] What might seem contradictory terms here actually capture well a typical perception that privacy and corporate regularity were complementary rather than opposed principles of effective devotion: a practice acknowledged to be 'unique' (*peculiaris*) is simultaneously 'regular' (*regularis*, i.e., according

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32 M. Brown, *Book of Cerne*, pp. 180–1, and 'Female Book Ownership'.
33 *De psalmorum usu* (PL 101: 465A–508C); see Black, 'Psalm Uses'.
34 Lapidge and Winterbottom (eds. and trans.), *Life of St Æthelwold*, p. lxviii (translation Lapidge's): 'horas regulares et peculiares sibi ad singulare seruitium instituit quas in tribus cursibus ordinauit, humillima diligentia quosque subiectos ammonens ut hoc secreto famulatu ignitis sathane temptamentis uigilanter resisterent . . . et ut fides . . . integra iugiter et inuiolata permaneat'. The phrase 'singulare seruitium' might also be translated 'special' or 'extraordinary observance'. Lapidge's parenthetical addition '(supplementary)' underscores my point that the term *regularis* here involves a symptomatic contradiction. The manuscript containing this description of the *horae peculiares* (Alençon, Bibliothèque municipale MS 14; s. xii) does not include the texts of the devotions, but Lapidge identifies some plausible candidates in other manuscripts (see *Life of St Æthelwold*, pp. lxix–lxxvii). For a separate Latin private prayer attributed (again, by a late source) to Æthelwold, see *ibid*., pp. lxxxiv–lxxxv.

to a regulation on par with Benedict's *Rule*); and 'individual observance' ('singulare seruitium') becomes a weapon for all in the community's struggle to preserve inviolate its collective-singular 'faith' ('fides'). The local development here is also revealing in view of the fact that Benedict's *Rule* and the liturgical customary bearing Æthelwold's own stamp, the *Regularis concordia*, encourage *orationes peculiares* but do not define their form or placement.[35] Save for the incidental survival of this brief text about Æthelwold's *horae peculiares*, we would never guess how far he went to endow with quasi-liturgical status a 'private' devotion, creating through a back door, as it were, a new communal custom. Much more of this kind of innovation may have encroached on organized religious life than our surviving texts convey.

As with the liturgical texts discussed above, private prayers, whether composed in England or merely adapted there, represented another high-status application of Latin literacy. But it is the florescence of the vernacular within Anglo-Saxon devotional traditions that distinguishes them in a European context and tends to draw more notice today. Whereas the vernacular lingered on the margins of formal liturgy, devotional composition came to accept Old English on more or less the same footing as Latin. What Gittos observed about the liturgical applies here as well, that we should beware the assumption that any inroads by Old English amounted to desperate measures. If the vernacular served to deepen pastoral care in liturgical settings, in devotion it may have at once encouraged and set limits on religious affect. It is probably no accident, as Allen Frantzen has noted, that prayers in Old English, some affective in character, circulated with penitential materials.[36] Such penitential prayers are, moreover, just part of a bigger picture: one recent inventory arrives at a total of 'roughly 250 vernacular prayers extant in twenty-three manuscripts written or owned in Anglo-Saxon England'.[37] While this tally could mislead – it includes Latin prayers merely glossed in Old English and makes no distinction at all between liturgical and devotional – the volume of potentially relevant materials is astonishing.

In comparison with the liturgical, moreover, Old English devotional composition also appears to have a longer history. One of the collections of private

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35 See Hanslik (ed.), *Benedicti regula*, chaps. 49.12 and 52.5; and Symons (ed. and trans.), *Regularis concordia*, p. 4.
36 Frantzen, 'Spirituality and Devotion', pp. 120–5; see also Fulk and Cain, *History of Old English Literature*, pp. 124–7.
37 Pulsiano, 'Prayers, Glosses and Glossaries', p. 209. Not included in the figure of *c.* 250 are reflexes, in Latin or Old English, of the Lord's Prayer and creeds, which Pulsiano identifies in thirty-one manuscripts (see his inventory, pp. 220–6).

Latin prayers, the Book of Cerne, is prefaced by a contemporary (i.e., ninth-century) vernacular 'Exhortation to Prayer':

> ... 7 ðe georne gebide gece 7 miltse fore alra his haligra gewyrhtum and geearningum 7 boenum b ... num ðam ðe domino deo gelicedon from fruman middangeardes; ðonne gehereð he ðec ðorh hiora ðingunga. Do ðonne fiorðan siðe ðin hleor ðriga to iorðan, fore alle godes cirican, 7 sing ðas fers: *Domini est salus; saluum fac populum tuum domine; praetende misericordiam tuam*; sing ðonne *Pater noster*; gebide ðonne fore alle geleaffullę men *In mundo*, ðonne bistu ðone deg dælniomende ðorh dryhtnes gefe alra ðeara goda ðe ænig monn for his noman gedoeð 7 ðec alle soðfestę foreðingiað *in caelo et in terra. Amen.*

> [... and eagerly pray for comfort and mercy, for the sake of the deeds, merits and prayers of all his saints ... who have been pleasing to God from the beginning of the world; then he will hear you on account of their intercessions. Then, for the fourth time, press your face three times to the earth for the sake of all God's church(es), and sing these verses: *Domini est salus* [cf. Psalm 3:9]; *saluum fac populum tuum domine* [cf. Psalm 27:9]; *praetende misericordiam tuam* [cf. Psalm 35:11]; then sing the *Pater noster*; then pray for all the faithful *in mundo* [in this world], then throughout that day you will, by the Lord's grace, be a partaker in all the good [works] that anyone does for his name's sake, and all the righteous *in caelo et in terra* [in heaven and on earth] will intercede for you. Amen.][38]

Now acephalous, the text in its full form must have been lengthy, if the three prostrations (?) prior to the fourth here mentioned were accompanied by similarly full instructions. Michelle Brown regards this 'Exhortation' as the key to an important theme that runs through the whole Book of Cerne: participation in the *communio sanctorum*.[39] In its communal and intercessory aspects, this 'private' devotion looks ahead to developments such as Æthelwold's *horae peculiares*, though it lacks the more pronounced 'regular' and corporate dimensions of the latter. On its own terms, the 'Exhortation' bears witness to an ambitious, unapologetic use of Old English in devotional contexts some generations before the surges of vernacular literary production associated with King Alfred or with the tenth-century Benedictine Reformers.

Comparable examples of bilingual devotions appear in many later Anglo-Saxon contexts, above all in psalters or liturgical books, penitential collections

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38 Kuypers (ed.), *Prayer Book of Aedeluald*, p. 3 (spacing and punctuation adjusted); the translation is mine, differing in minor points from Kuypers's.

39 M. Brown, *Book of Cerne*, pp. 129–30, 146–51, although her reading depends in part on Kuypers's translation of the phrase 'fore alle godes cirican' as 'before all God's church'; cf. my translation above ('for the sake of'), and *DOE s.v.* fore, A.7.d. and A.7.d.i.

and ecclesiastical miscellanies. It is difficult to generalize about such diverse materials, but two more illustrations may highlight some continuities and distinctions. Consider first a series of directives for private devotion in London, British Library, MS Cotton Titus D. xxvi, a manuscript forming part of the aforementioned prayerbook of Ælfwine, later abbot over the reformed Benedictine community at Winchester's New Minster. This text, entirely in Old English except for some incipits, begins with no identifying heading:

> Ælce sunnandæg bebeod þe ðære þrynnesse naman, þæt is fæder ⁊ sunu ⁊ se halga gast. ⁊ sing 'Benedicite' ⁊ 'Gloria in excelsis Deo' ⁊ 'Credo in Deum' ⁊ 'Pater Noster' Criste to lofe, þonne gelimpð þe ealle wucan þe bet. Mihtest þu gewunian þæt ðu hit sunge ælce dæge, þonne ðu ærest onwoce. ⁊ cweþ ðonne 'God ælmihtig, for þinre miclan mildheortnesse ⁊ for ðissa Godes worda mægne, miltsa me, ⁊ syle me minra gedonra synna forgyfnesse, ⁊ ðara toweardra gescildnessa, ⁊ þine bletsunga to eallum þingum ⁊ huru minre sawle reste on ðam ecan life ⁊ a ðine miltse.' ⁊ geþenc ælce frigedæge, þæt ðu strecce þe on eorðan Godes þances, ⁊ sing 'DEVS misereatur nostri' [Psalm 66]. ⁊ do þis dihlice, þær ðu sylf sy. ⁊ geþenc þæt he ðrowode on þone dæg micel for eall mancyn. Ne mæg ænig mann on his agen geþeode þa geswinc ⁊ þara costnunga nearonessa, þe him onbecumað, Gode swa fulfremedlice areccan, ne his mildheortnesse biddan, swa he mæg mid þillicum sealmum ⁊ mid oþrum swilcum. Gyf þu ælce dæge þine tidsangas wel asingst, ne þearft ðu næfre to helle, ⁊ eac on þisse worulde þu hæfst þe gedefe lif. ⁊ gyf ðu on hwilcum earfeðum byst ⁊ to Gode clypast, he ðe miltsað ⁊ eac tiþað, þonne þu hine bitsð. Amen.

> [Every Sunday commend yourself in the name of the Trinity, that is the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit. And sing *Benedicite* [*Domino*] and *Gloria in excelsis Deo* and *Credo in Deum* [i.e., the Apostles' creed] and the *Pater noster* in praise of Christ; [if you do this,] then things will work out the better for you during the whole week [ahead]. (You ought to have become accustomed to singing it every day, when you have first woken up.) And then say: 'Almighty God, for the sake of your great mercy and the power of these words of God, have mercy on me, and grant me forgiveness for the sins I have done and protection against future transgressions; and [grant me] your blessings in all things and, especially, rest for my soul and your mercy always, in the life everlasting.' And every Friday be mindful that, for God's sake, you prostrate yourself on the ground and sing *Deus misereatur nostri* [Psalm 66]; and do this secretly, where you are by yourself. And consider that on that day he suffered much for all humankind. There is no one who, using his own language, can convey to God all the labours and the hardships of temptations that he meets, or pray for his mercy, so effectively as he can do with such

psalms as the [aforementioned] and with others like them. And if you sing your canonical hours well every day, you need never [go] to hell, and you will also have a tranquil life here in this world; and if you are in any difficulties and call upon God, he will show you mercy and also grant what you ask of him. Amen.][40]

The texts lacks the formality of Æthelwold's *horae peculiares*, but its status as a *de facto* custom is implied ('Mihtest þu gewunian', etc.). The private character of the devotion registers in the singular addressee whose personal well-being is the goal ('þonne gelimpð þe . . . þe bet'). The practices commended do not take place within the mass or office but 'secretly' ('dihlice, þær ðu sylf sy'), although this might not mean entirely 'alone'; describing private prayer as 'secret' was conventional, based ultimately on Matthew 6:6, and corresponding Latin terms (e.g., *privatim*, *secretius*, *tacite*) admit various interpretations. More interesting is that the instructions venture an implied comparison between the results of devotional and liturgical prayer: promised benefits of the former – a good life in this world and salvation hereafter – do not really differ from those guaranteed by faithful singing of the office. (The noun 'tidsangas' need not imply a full choral performance of the liturgical hours; it might also refer to their solo recitation by, for example, a lone priest serving a manorial or parish church, or a monk journeying outside his house.[41]) Another tension results here from mixed messages concerning the proper 'language' ('geþeod') for communication with God. Just after an original prayer in Old English ('"God ælmihtig"', etc.), an assertion follows that the most effective private prayers depend not on the devotee's improvisations but on 'the power of these words of God', referring to the common heritage of the Psalms and, probably, the Lord's Prayer and creed, all here recommended as sufficient 'praise' ('lof') for Christ.[42]

The various types of convergence here – of private with communal, vernacular with Latin, invention with tradition – turn out to be typical of other texts positioned between devotion and liturgy. Such cases also notoriously include many of the so-called charms. Once perceived as survivals of a thinly veiled popular paganism, the charms have emerged in recent scholarship as highly

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40 Günzel (ed.), *Ælfwine's Prayerbook*, p. 143 (I omit her sentence numbers and adjust punctuation slightly; translation mine).

41 Ælfric and Wulfstan admonish secular clergy to recite their hours: see Ælfric, *Hirtenbriefe*, pp. 12 (I.48), 100 (II.73); also Wulfstan, *Canons of Edgar*, pp. 10–11 (Canon 45). On the possible relevance of the 'Old English Benedictine office', see below.

42 The sentence concerning psalmody as an unsurpassable expression of human needs at prayer ('Ne mæg . . . oðrum swilcum') is a close translation from Alcuin, *De psalmorum usu* (PL 101: 466c), not identified in Günzel's edition.

specialized forms of learning wielded by clerical and monastic elites in later Anglo-Saxon England.[43] It was primarily in those institutional contexts, at least, that the compilers of surviving manuscripts seem to have avoided, or simply not known, sharp distinctions between charms and other kinds of supplicatory Christian prayer. A good example of the type survives in a pair of late manuscripts associated with two major Benedictine centres in the eleventh century: London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius A. iii, a miscellany of monastic, pedagogical and didactic texts copied around mid-century, probably at Christ Church Canterbury; and Cambridge, MS Corpus Christi College 391, a collection primarily of materials for the monastic office and associated with the last native bishop of the Anglo-Saxon Church, Wulfstan II of Worcester (1062–95). In both books there occur, alongside various devotional materials, lengthy *ordines* for private veneration of the cross, elements of which derive wholly from the Good Friday liturgy recorded in Æthelwold's *Regularis concordia* and other sources.[44] Near the end of the series in both versions, a new section begins (here quoted from CCCC 391):

> GYF ÐE ÐYNCE þæt ðine fynd þwyrlice ymbe þe ðrydian, ðonne gang þu on gelimplicere stowe, 7 þe ða halgan rode to gescyldnesse geciig; 7 asete þe aðenedum earmum 7 cweð þus ærest: *Ave alma crux quæ mundi pretium portasti, quæ uexilla regis eterni ferebas; in te enim Christus triumphauit, in te et ego miser peccator famulus tuus N. O sancta crux omnes in nos insurgentes uincamus. per.* Sing ðonne þas salmas oð ende: *Domine deus meus in te speraui . . .*

> [If it seems to you that your enemies are maliciously plotting against you, then go to an appropriate place and call upon the holy cross for your protection; and position yourself with arms outstretched, and first say thus: *Hail bountiful cross, who bore the ransom for the world, who did carry the banners of the eternal king; for in you Christ has triumphed; in you I also, a wretched sinner, your servant N. [have triumphed]. O holy cross, may we overcome all those who rise up against us; through [Christ our Lord].* Then sing these psalms through: *O Lord, my God, in thee have I put my trust . . .* [Psalm 7]][45]

The text continues with more psalms, the *Kyrie*, Lord's Prayer, short *preces*, plus a longer Latin prayer. Additional Old English instructions and Latin components follow, ending with the directive:

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43 Most energetically advanced by Jolly, *Popular Religion*, and 'Cross-Referencing'. See also Liuzza's article 'Prayers and/or Charms'.
44 On this text and its settings, see Liuzza, 'Prayers and/or Charms'.
45 Hughes (ed.), *Portiforium*, vol. II, p. 24 (translation mine). In CCCC 391 this text appears to be a twelfth-century addition. Liuzza, 'Prayers and/or Charms', pp. 314–16, prints text and sources of the version in Cotton Tiberius A. iii.

⁊ wyrc swyþe gelome cristes rode tacen on ðinum heafde ⁊ cweð þis gelome: *Ecce crucem domini.* ⁊ *cweþ ðis þonne: Hoc signaculo sanctæ crucis* [*prosternantur, domine, omnes inimici mei tam uisibiles quam inuisibiles, tam presentes quam absentes, tam potentes quam impotentes.* AMEN.]

[and make the sign of Christ's cross very often on your head and say this often: *Behold the cross of the Lord.* And then say this: *By this sign of the holy cross, O Lord, may all my enemies be laid low, both the visible and the invisible, the present and the absent, the mighty and the weak. Amen.*][46]

The bilingual form and apotropaic character of the entire ritual encouraged earlier scholars to consider this text a charm, but Roy Liuzza's analysis of the parallel version transmitted by Cotton Tiberius A. iii makes a strong case that 'the so-called charm ['Gyf ðe ðynce'] differs neither in tone, kind, content, or origin from the prayers which precede it; like the Adoration service, it consists of psalms, prayers, and collects gathered from various liturgical occasions'.[47]

Such ceremonies around the cross demonstrate the creative reciprocity not only between liturgical and devotional practices, but between liturgy and a wider range of pious expression in Latin and Old English.[48] The dynamism of those relationships shows in the proliferation of texts such as 'Ælce sunnandæg' or 'Gyf ðe ðynce', which should, in their turn, be placed alongside the wider contemporary production, discussed above, of embellished liturgies for the mass and office and at pontifical services.

'Liturgical' and 'devotional' verse in Old English

All the trends sketched to this point are of literary-historical significance in their own right. But a further value is their potential to draw out similarities and differences between the kinds of text discussed so far and certain Old English poems dubbed 'liturgical' or 'devotional' in modern criticism. The vagueness of those descriptors as applied to the poetry has long dissatisfied, being easily blamed on the same dearth of contextual clues that hinders

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46 Hughes (ed.) *Portiforium*, vol. II, p. 24 (translation mine). The conclusion to the formula *Hoc signaculo crucis* is supplied from an earlier passage in the text, not quoted above. The Tiberius A. iii version reads 'on þinum heafde ⁊ on þinum heortan' (Liuzza, 'Prayers and/or Charms', p. 316).

47 Liuzza, 'Prayers and/or Charms', p. 313.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 290: 'the influence between private and public prayer was mutual . . . a great deal of sharing and borrowing took place between the public and private devotions to the cross'. The Good Friday veneration of the cross was especially prone to yield and reabsorb devotional elements; see Boynton, 'Prayer as Liturgical Performance', pp. 911–18.

efforts to historicize most kinds of Old English verse. One implication of the preceding remarks, however, is that a fuzziness about 'liturgical' and 'devotional' as labels is itself historically meaningful, reflecting the complex interdependence of the two categories during the very centuries that produced our Old English poems.

Influences from the liturgy have been perceived in much Old English verse, but at present the term 'liturgical poetry' refers more narrowly to a set of compositions based on common Latin texts that served various liturgical purposes. As affirmed in a series of studies by Sarah Larratt Keefer, the group includes three different versified forms of the Lord's Prayer (or *Pater noster*), two of the *Gloria patri* (or doxology) and one of the Apostles' creed (*Credo in Deum*), as well as the *Kentish Psalm* (a poetic paraphrase of Psalm 50, *Miserere mei Deus*), the *Kentish Hymn* (echoing phrases from the *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, the hymn *Te Deum* and creeds) and perhaps the poem called by modern editors 'A Prayer'.[49] Keefer's studies have shed light on the textual sources and, especially, the codicological settings of this group of poems. Her analyses of their content and rhetorical development seek to distinguish among them three kinds of poetic voice: the first 'derives its impulse directly from the liturgy', the second 'is devotional within the context of the liturgy', and a third 'uses liturgy as inspiration to create . . . vernacular meditation'.[50]

These categories helpfully acknowledge the spreading middle ground between liturgy and devotion, and the range of productivity that flourished there. There seems accordingly less need, however, to assume that any Old English 'liturgical poetry' resulted from the direct influence of liturgy proper. It is true that the Latin texts inspiring this body of verse served functions within the liturgy. Yet the most readily identifiable of them – the Lord's Prayer, *Gloria patri*, the creed and Psalm 50 – played roles as large or larger in devotions, penance, remedies and charms. A liturgical orientation for the Old English poems may appear to be supported by the fact that three of them (*Gloria I*, *The Lord's Prayer III* and *The Creed*) are transmitted together in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 121 (Worcester, s. xi²), within a compilation given the misleading modern title of 'the Old English Benedictine office'. The poems stand there in a framework of Latin and Old English

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49 For a summation of this canon and its manuscripts, see Keefer, '"Ic" and "we"', pp. 142–3, note 20. There and in her recent edition (*Old English Liturgical Verse*) she gives the poems new titles, but, for simplicity's sake, I retain the more familiar ones assigned in the ASPR and adopted by *DOE*. The poem 'A Prayer' is less closely connected with others in the group; see Keefer (ed.), *Old English Liturgical Verse*, pp. 158, 161, and her 'Respect for the Book', p. 37.

50 Keefer, '"Ic" and "we"', p. 128.

materials, in prose and verse, laid out to resemble an unevenly abbreviated form of daily office, probably of secular rather than monastic use.[51] Each division of this 'Benedictine office' is also prefaced by a brief prose exposition in Old English, translating sentences from Hrabanus Maurus' *De clericorum institutione* on the typological significance of the various hours. Some modern scholars have seen the compilation as an effort to constitute a vernacular office in miniature, perhaps for laymen or secular clergy who lacked the necessary books and Latinity to observe the divine office in all its complexity. A more persuasive view, emphasizing the didactic framework of the whole 'Benedictine office', perceives in it a sort of training manual for secular clergy or monastic *conversi*. Such an audience may indeed have lacked strong Latin, but the mere presence of the vernacular, or of poetry, should no more demand that assumption here than it did in the Old English liturgical rubrics. In form, the 'Benedictine office' could in fact be seen in the context of a quite progressive trend in eleventh-century Latin liturgy at Worcester and Exeter, namely the production of 'sample' offices, illustrating how various components of the liturgy of the hours fit together.[52] While the 'Benedictine office' differs from those 'samples' in important ways, their useful lesson is that incompleteness may signal not a poor-man's liturgy but a context where supplementary resources lay close at hand.

Whatever its intended purposes, situating the composition of the 'Benedictine office' on the liturgical-devotional (or liturgical-rubrical) borderlands makes several features of the text appear less eccentric. The origins of individual 'liturgical poems' are in any case a question separate from the intention of the redactor(s) who assembled the 'Old English Benedictine Office'. The latter work as it survives in Junius 121 is a composite, and its poetic items may have been composed for other purposes, under diverse influences. For example, the bilingual arrangement that characterizes *The Lord's Prayer II–III*, *Gloria I* and *The Creed* could suggest several affiliations at once. The first three divisions of *Lord's Prayer III* may illustrate:

> *Pater noster qui es in cęlis.*
> Fæder manncynnes,   frofres ic þe bidde,
> halig drihten,   þu ðe on heofenum eart.
>   *Sanctificetur nomen tuum.*
> Þæt sy gehalgod,   hygecræftum fæst,

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51 Houghton, 'Old English Benedictine Office'. Despite its flaws (including the title), the standard edition remains Ure (ed.), *Benedictine Office*. See fuller discussion and references in C. A. Jones, 'Book of the Liturgy', pp. 693–5.
52 Pfaff, 'Sample Week'.

þin nama nu ða,   neriende Crist,
in urum ferhðlocan   fæste gestaðelod.
　 Adueniat regnum tuum.
Cume nu to mannum,   mihta wealdend,
þin rice to us,   rihtwis dema,
and ðin geleafa   in lifdæge
on urum mode   mære þurhwunige.

[*Pater noster qui es in cęlis*: Father of mankind, to you I pray for consolation, holy Lord, who are in heaven; *Sanctificetur nomen tuum*: that your name, saviour Christ, would now be sanctified, fixed fast in our thoughts, securely in our hearts. *Adueniat regnum tuum*: ruler of powers, may your kingdom now come to us men, and may faith in you, righteous judge, gloriously endure in our mind all the days of our lives.][53]

At first glance, this way of proceeding invites comparison with the sort of *gradatim* paraphrase-translations on which catechists and preachers throughout the Middle Ages must have relied. A useful comparandum would be the ninth-century Old High German 'Freisinger *Pater noster*', which also takes the Lord's Prayer clause by Latin clause, translates each and expounds it with comment.[54] The resemblance goes only so far, however, since the Old High German text is in prose. Likewise in prose but providing a different parallel to the expansiveness of the Old English verses would be Latin commentaries on the Lord's Prayer, creeds and other items from the liturgy. On the continent, such commentaries often circulated together, especially in manuscripts that gathered missionary and catechetical resources.[55] Finally, a quite different sort of influence may have come from contemporary Latin versifications of the Lord's Prayer and creed, which were evidently favoured compositional exercises.[56] These often treat the source texts freely and in that respect resemble a poem such as the *Kentish Hymn*, loosely structured on phrases taken in sequence from the *Gloria in excelsis*.

For contextualizing 'liturgical verse', it is perhaps most instructive to contrast use of that label by scholars of Old English with the meaning that it carries for Latinists and liturgical historians. Among the latter, 'liturgical

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53 Dobbie (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, p. 77 (translation mine).

54 Braune and Helm (eds.), *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*, p. 34. See also versions of the *Pater noster* and Apostles' creed in the 'Weissenburger Katechismus' (*ibid.*, pp. 34–5), which adopt the same format but do not include the Latin.

55 For examples, see Keefe, *Water and the Word*, vol. I, pp. 23–6. Such expositions occasionally entered the vernacular preaching tradition as well; Ælfric, for example, has sermons in Old English devoted to the Lord's Prayer and to the creeds.

56 Walther, 'Versifizierte "pater noster" und "credo"'.

poetry' usually signifies, for the ninth through eleventh centuries, the burgeoning repertory of tropes and sequences for use directly in the liturgy. As noted most recently by Bruce Holsinger, the alternation of liturgical quotation (or near-quotation) with poetic elaborations recalls the technique of liturgical tropes, a type of composition that, as mentioned already, flourished in some late Anglo-Saxon religious communities.[57] Though their target texts obviously differ, the form of a composition such as *The Lord's Prayer III* might be compared with that of a representative example from the Winchester Troper – here a trope on the *Gloria in excelsis deo*, from the ordinary of the mass (the fixed words of the *Gloria* are set in italics):

> *Gloria in excelsis Deo* [*et in terra pax hominibus bonae uoluntatis*].
> Laudat in excelsis celum terramque regentem
>   angelicus cetus, laudat et omnis homo: *Laudamus te*.
> Te benedicit ouans angelorum celsa potestas
>   et mortalis homo te benedicit ouans: *Benedicimus te*.
> Te adorant ueneranter cunctae cateruae polorum,
>   Te tellus pelagus laudat adorat amat. *Adoramus te*.

[*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will*. The angelic assembly praises him in the highest who rules heaven and earth, and every human being praises him: *We praise you*. The exalted might of the angels blesses you, rejoicing, and, rejoicing, mortal man blesses you: *We bless you*. All the throngs of the heavens adore you with reverence; the earth and the deep praise, adore and love you: *We adore you*.][58]

This particular trope was not original to the Winchester repertory, nor were all trope texts composed in quantitative metre, though many were (the present instance employs elegiac couplets). The similarity to Old English poems such as *The Lord's Prayer II–III*, *Gloria I* and *The Creed* is nevertheless suggestive: a fragmentation and, to borrow Holsinger's musicological term, 'dilation' of the liturgical base text creates an expandable yet ultimately controlled space for invention.

What filled that space cannot finally be reduced to a single genre. This resistance should not surprise, given the overlap of medieval liturgical and devotional traditions, not to mention their service in a variety of other

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57 Holsinger, 'Liturgy', pp. 306–7. Previous critics have compared liturgical tropes to other kinds of Old English composition: see, e.g., Boenig (ed. and trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Spirituality*, pp. 45–6; and Rudolf, 'Journey to the Borderland'.
58 Frere (ed.), *Winchester Troper*, p. 58 (lightly emended and repunctuated; translation mine).

functions – such as the use of prayer-, psalm- and hymn-texts in medieval education, or the increasing attention to liturgical texts as objects worthy of free-standing historical and allegorical commentary.[59] Old English 'liturgical poetry' emerged within this network of influences, which in turn accounts for the chameleon-like quality of the poems when placed against several backgrounds.

Further directions

As labels for Old English verse, 'liturgical' and 'devotional' may endure for convenience, but they do risk flattening some historical textures. Those labels may also perpetuate unhelpful divisions between 'liturgical verse' strictly defined and other texts similarly conditioned. An obvious example of the latter kind would be the so-called *Advent Lyrics* (or *Christ I*), surviving incomplete at the beginning of the Exeter Book. As Susan Rankin established in her study of these poems in relation to the Advent 'Great "O"' antiphons that they expansively paraphrase, the Anglo-Saxon author was evidently someone who had assembled a more comprehensive set of the Latin antiphons than could ever have been used in the actual liturgy.[60] In other words, the poet was also a connoisseur of liturgical texts as a literary resource: even if never sung in the office, they were prized as a ground for subsequent inventions.

A confluence of public liturgy, private devotion and vernacular verse has also been perceived in the famous *Dream of the Rood*, most extensively through Éamonn Ó Carragáin's readings of the poem in conjunction with the Ruthwell Cross monument and liturgical customs of seventh-century Rome.[61] But less obvious candidates also benefit from re-evaluation in the contexts being outlined here. In a provocative new interpretation of Cædmon's *Hymn*, for example, Bruce Holsinger has questioned the common assumptions that Old English verse was necessarily excluded from liturgical settings, or that the *Hymn* itself owes nothing to the metres of Latin office hymnody.[62] The implications of Holsinger's arguments, if accepted, will require literary scholars to look to the history of liturgical forms as fundamentally relevant to the study of Anglo-Saxon poetics.

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59 On liturgical texts in the schoolroom, see G. H. Brown, 'Dynamics of Literacy'; on liturgical commentary in Anglo-Saxon England, see C. A. Jones, 'Book of the Liturgy'.
60 Rankin, 'Liturgical Background'.
61 Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*. But Ó Carragáin's interpretations are not universally accepted; see Orton *et al.*, *Fragments of History*, pp. 163, 189–94.
62 Holsinger, 'Parable of Cædmon's *Hymn*', pp. 164–75.

The present chapter has, in the meantime, pointed to some materials in Latin and Old English that, if often unprepossessing in themselves, illustrate important qualities of liturgy as an expansive cultural fabric that connects readings as methodologically diverse as Ó Carragáin's and Holsinger's. For reasons of space, other texts have scarcely been mentioned here that were also woven into that fabric. The abundant Anglo-Saxon penitential materials certainly bear on the issues of vernacularity and the divide between public and private.[63] Likewise, the many surviving glosses to psalters, hymnals and prayer collections represent a well-known site of intersection between liturgy, devotion and the acquisition of literacy.[64] Much more should be said, moreover, about monastic rules and customaries, which deal extensively with liturgy and devotion and, moreover, were among the texts that late Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics prioritized for translation into Old English.[65]

Expanded in these and other directions, our awareness of Anglo-Saxon liturgical cultures might eventually return to larger questions. Is it possible to discuss the practical implications of liturgical-devotional culture for literary invention without collapsing most distinctions between prayer, meditation and reading, or without invoking such terms as mere place-holders? Both tendencies have, unfortunately, been common unintended legacies of Leclercq's *Love of Learning and the Desire for God* in modern criticism of medieval monastic literature. For that matter, how should such perceived features of literary form be mapped onto a history of Anglo-Saxon religious institutions, wherein the 'Benedictine Reform' still tends to crowd out the very possibility of identifying other, competing voices? Is it possible, for instance, that some Latin and vernacular devotional elements in late Anglo-Saxon manuscripts preserve what had been prayer traditions – or even liturgical traditions – of the more numerous 'unreformed' English minsters?[66] Finally, what might Anglo-Saxon liturgical and devotional compositions, whether within or outside reformed Benedictine influence, have *received* from vernacular literary tradition?

To the final question, at least, this chapter has suggested elements of a possible answer: mastery of Latin euchology, reworked through countless variations in ateliers that churned out new liturgical texts and tirelessly

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63 See Frantzen, 'Spirituality and Devotion', and *Literature of Penance*, pp. 169–73.
64 G. H. Brown, 'Dynamics of Literacy', pp. 194–207; see also Boynton, 'Training for the Liturgy'. For the later Middle Ages, see Zieman, *Singing the New Song*.
65 See note 21 above.
66 Cf. Black, 'Divine Office', p. 64, on Carolingian prayer collections that preserve as devotional items texts from the suppressed Gallican liturgy.

rewrote old ones, recall practices of formulaic variation for which Old English and Anglo-Latin poets are known. This is not to suggest that Latin liturgical texts or private prayers deliberately mimic Old English verse, but rather that similarities of compositional technique could reinforce one another, and that literacy in both languages entailed a common store of heuristic practices. The resemblances would be easy to dismiss in contexts other than ones so dense with mutual influences: liturgical innovation and experimentation among the Anglo-Saxons redounded to the composition of 'private' prayers and devotions. The latter, conversely, created new pressures on the spaces and texts of the liturgy, as qualities associated with newly composed devotions worked their way back into the spirituality and aesthetic of those charged with (re)-making liturgical texts. It is reasonable to wonder, at least, how often the authors of liturgies were not also the composers of private prayers, and of liturgical poetry as well, in one or both languages.

Chapter 18

Riddles, wonder and responsiveness
in Anglo-Saxon literature

PATRICIA DAILEY

Day, speech, moon, time, dream, true dream, death, cloud, word, letter and comet: each has been proposed as a possible solution for Riddle 39 of the Exeter Book.[1] When an Anglo-Saxon riddle states, 'Saga hwæt ic hatte' [Say what I am called], or a Latin prose riddle urges, 'Dic mihi quae est illa res' [Tell me what that thing is], they perform, in a discursive way, what all riddles effectuate implicitly on a broader scale: riddles produce responsiveness in their audiences, even if they do not explicitly ask the reader to name the object in question.[2] Whether the response is voiced in an 'oral' context or in a 'literary' one (however problematic that distinction may be), as John Niles has underscored, 'Poetry, like riddling, presents itself rhetorically as a public and interactive form of communication even when we encounter it on the manuscript page.'[3] Even though particular responses to riddles will be considered in this chapter, my emphasis here is on responsiveness as a category in and of itself, both in the Exeter Book and in other Anglo-Saxon poetry and prose, in order to explore what a response may effectuate, *in addition to* producing an answer. Like charms, a genre of Old English poetic writing with which the riddles are often associated, riddles encourage speech and vocalization; and like wonders, riddles play on the relation between the intangible and the familiar.[4] Because the rhetorical style of *enigmata* or riddles

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1 For the Exeter Book riddles, see Krapp and Dobbie (eds.), *Exeter Book*; I have also consulted Williamson (ed.), *Old English Riddles*. Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

2 The formula 'saga hwæt (*or* hu) ic hatte' [Say what (or how) I am called] is found in Riddles 1, 3, 8, 10, 11, 12, 19, 23, 62, 66, 73, 80, 83 and 86. The variation 'Frige hwæt ic hatte' [Find out what I am called] is found in Riddles 14, 16, 26 and 27. For the Latin prose riddle, see *Collectanea* 79 in Bayless and Lapidge (eds.), *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae*, p. 130. For a classification of the riddles according to rhetorical formulas, see Orchard, 'Enigma Variations'.

3 Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, p. 44.

4 On riddles, maxims and proverbs, see Cavill, *Maxims*.

is, by definition, a style that relies upon obfuscation and, in the case of Old English riddles, overarchingly ascribes a sense of the mysterious and wondrous ('Ic eom wunderlicu wiht' [I am a wondrous creature], Riddle 25) to even the most common of objects, my aim is to explore what, if any, pedagogic ends making something unfamiliar might serve in cultivating response, in addition to the simple rhetorical fact of veiling a thing known.

Rather than pursue the well-travelled paths of mapping out the riddles' solutions and possible organization, looking at their relation to their Anglo-Latin counterparts and literary precedents, or contemplating the history and possible purpose of the Exeter Book as a whole, as others have successfully done, this chapter enters obliquely into the riddles to see how they participate in what I will tentatively call a culture of responsiveness as it is portrayed in Anglo-Saxon literature.[5] Our own scholarly responses to riddles have been transformed over the past century: from considering Anglo-Saxon riddles as mere play and bawdy humour to regarding them as complex and self-reflexive verse forms; from fireside entertainment to highly crafted pedagogical tools; from being derivatives of Latin verse and prose riddles to offering innovative forms particular to the language and culture. While answers have almost obsessively been sought out and continue to be found for the Exeter Book riddles, as we achieve a better historical understanding of their context and language another strain in scholarship has emerged that ponders the *effects* of engaging with riddles and producing answers both in individual instances and as a whole. This chapter will emphasize the latter approach in looking at the Exeter Book riddles by focusing on how responsiveness is both embedded in riddles and produced by the reading of riddles, and how this responsiveness engages with cultivating a wondrous response to the unknown.

Wonderful responses

In a simple sense, responding to the unknown in riddles exposes something about the respondent's mind and, by extension, a moral (or other) quality associated with the respondent's person. In provoking an answer, responsiveness renders audible a trace of the inner, a sign of how one reads. The riddling tradition's participation in verbal contests attests to this, in potentially exposing the wit and discerning mind of the recipient, and occasionally promoting the wit of the composer of the riddle. In this sense, riddles function as a form of social

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5 On the possible divisions of the Exeter Book manuscript, see Conner, 'Structure of the Exeter Book Codex'.

display and accumulation of cultural capital – a means of securing distinction in the Bourdieuian sense. The riddle poems in the epistolary exchanges between Charlemagne, Paul the Deacon and Peter of Pisa, composed between 782 and 786, include one sent by Charlemagne to Paul, requiring him to figure out the solution overnight – to which Paul responded by sending additional riddles, hoping to gain time. Taking on a tone of 'poetic sparring', or even of a flyting, these riddles show a spirit of competition and entertainment (like the riddle game in *Apollonius of Tyre*) shared by the Carolingian court and place an emphasis on the knowable qualities in a riddle and their propensity for correct answers.[6] In the uses of riddles in contests of wit, the presence or absence of an answer may simply signal a respondent's cleverness, familiarity with the riddling tradition, wisdom or the lack thereof. Riddles have long been associated with hidden wisdom, like that in the ancient Greek story of the riddle of the Sphinx, and also contests of power, as in Samson's riddle to the Philistines in Judges 14, yet the Exeter Book riddles also play rhetorically on these conceits.[7]

When Riddle 2 of the Exeter Book apostrophizes its addressee, 'Saga, þoncol mon' [12; Speak, thoughtful man], it may also be teasing its potential solver in prematurely commending him for his mental vigour. The closing lines of Aldhem's Enigma 100, 'Sciscitor inflatos fungor quo nomine sophos' [I challenge the puffed-up wise ones to say what name I use], suggest even more explicitly that the riddles test and potentially deflate the riddle-solver's pretence to wisdom, likening, as many have noted, the riddle genre to forms of pedagogy and education.[8] In the case of a monk's hasty response to one of the double entendre sexual riddles in the Exeter Book (riddles 25, 44, 45, 54, 61) which pun on an otherwise masked body part or hidden desire, the riddle may expose the speaker's responsive and unsublimated body, inverting an approved hierarchy by subjecting the mind to a body's impulses and desires. In this sense responsiveness to riddles functions, to a greater and lesser extent, like a mirror, in that what is unknown in the riddle serves to provoke something *knowable* about the responder who, with aid, may become more attuned to the subtleties of language.

The association of riddles with forms of learning is not new: Patrizia Lendinara conceived of riddles as a form of wisdom poetry along with charms,

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6 Garrison, 'Emergence of Carolingian Latin Literature', p. 121.

7 See Boryslawski, *Old English Riddles*, p. 114. Samson's riddle is given as an example of the trope of enigma in the *Ars maior* of Donatus and in Isidore's discussion of the difference between enigma and allegory: see M. Irvine, *Making of Textual Culture*, pp. 230–1.

8 Stork (ed.), *Aldhelm's Riddles*, p. 235. I am, however, using Ehwald's numbering (Stork's is 101).

gnomes and catalogue poems, claiming that the genre preserved forms of traditional knowledge.[9] More recently, Andy Orchard has identified riddles as a far more sophisticated and self-conscious genre which, following James Anderson's and Martha Bayless's work, can be counted as part of a larger literary tradition that can be linked with dialogue forms and traditions like the Anglo-Latin *disputatio*.[10] As Thomas Hill has shown, riddles can be connected to other verse dialogues, like the anonymous *Solomon and Saturn II*, but one could also link them to the dialogic prose *Solomon and Saturn* and *Adrian and Ritheus*, contests of wit between presumed 'sages', as well as the Latin *Joca monachorum* [*Games of the Monks*], a humorous series of dialogues designed for monks.[11] Reading riddles in the light of a traditional question-and-answer form makes the link between rendering a subject responsive and riddling explicit, but does not necessarily account for the singularity of the Exeter Book riddles, their verse form and the singularity of the challenges they present. Drawing upon Alcuin's fictionalized and playful 'quid est' dialogue with Charlemagne's son Pippin, Martha Bayless points out, 'Alcuin's dialogue thus forms a very early example of a more informal and conversational framework for riddles, although it is one that reflects their origins – as questions and answers, a guessing game between two people – more clearly than the monumental and often unguessable riddles of the verse collections.'[12] Latin riddles and riddle cycles have often been characterized as circulating with answers to the riddles, in contrast to their Old English counterparts, yet Andy Orchard has contested this generalization, showing how answers in many riddle manuscripts (including those of the Exeter Book) are often present as marginalia, written by a later hand, or may be encrypted to a degree that significantly challenges the reader.[13]

In the Exeter Book riddles, encrypted answers may serve a purpose other than simply providing a correct response. Riddle 42 (a cock and hen mating) performs a response to its being read after explicitly encrypting the answers, 'hana' [cock] and 'hæn' [hen], in shared runic letters (spelled out in Roman script) in the body of the poem. Throughout the poem, openness and secrecy

9 Lendinara, 'World of Anglo-Saxon Learning', pp. 276–9.

10 Orchard, 'Enigma Variations'. Bayless also links the *Collectanea* and the riddles to the later medieval Old Norse *Alfræði Íslenzk* and the proverb dialogues of the *Disputatio Adriani Augusti et Epicteti philosophi* ('*Collectanea* and Medieval Dialogues and Riddles', pp. 13–24). See also Hansen, 'Asking and Answering: Riddles, Charms, and *Solomon and Saturn II*' in her *Solomon Complex*. The relation of dialogue to pedagogy is also exemplified by Ælfric's *Colloquy*.

11 T. D. Hill, 'Saturn's Time Riddle'. On the *Joca monachorum* and other riddle traditions, see J. E. Anderson, *Two Literary Riddles*, pp. 10–11.

12 Bayless, 'Alcuin's *Disputatio Pippini*', p. 160.

13 Orchard, 'Enigma Variations'.

cohabit with one another in non-oppositional fashion, suggesting a parallel between the openness of the runes (and by association, the act of reading) and the flagrant cock and hen. In narrating how one should decrypt the riddle of the two creatures who are 'playing the marriage game', 'cohabiting', or 'copulating' (or all three)[14] in the anthropomorphic guise of a man and woman, the riddle provides a mirror for the 'book-wise men', the supposed addressees, to model how they should be responding to the riddle itself:

> Ic seah wyhte   wrætlice twa
> undearnunga   ute plegan
> hæmedlaces;   hwitloc anfeng
> wlanc under wædum,   gif þæs weorces speow,
> fæmne fyllo.   Ic on flette mæg
> þurh runstafas   rincum secgan,
> þam þe bec witan,   bega ætsomne
> naman þara wihta.   Þær sceal Nyd wesan
> twega oþer   ond se torhta æsc
> an an linan,   Acas twegen,
> Hægelas swa some.   Hwylc þæs hordgates
> cægan cræfte   þa clamme onleac
> þe þa rædellan   wið rynemenn
> hygefæste heold   heortan bewrigene
> orþoncbendum?   Nu is undyrne
> werum æt wine   hu þa wihte mid us,
> heanmode twa,   hatne sindon.

[I saw two wondrous creatures unsecretly play (out) the marriage game; if the deed was successful, the fair-haired maid, proud under (her) clothes, received (her) fill. By means of runic letters I can tell in the hall to book-wise men the names of both those creatures together. There must be *nyd* twice over, and the bright *æsc* a single one on the line, two of *ac*, and the same for *hægel*. Which riddler has unlocked with the power of a key the fastenings of the treasure-door which held the riddle mind-fast against riddle solvers, concealed in its heart by cunning bonds? Now it is unsecret to men at wine how those two low-minded creatures are called among us.][15]

Explicitly guiding the riddle-solver, the riddle makes its own decoding part of its narrative. In emphasizing that the book-wise are the intended addressees of the riddle, the riddle-solver understands that erudition and book

14 The term *hæmedlac* may refer to copulation, cohabitation, adultery or the state of marriage.
15 The reading of 'hwylc' is problematic and varies. See Krapp and Dobbie (eds.), *Exeter Book*, pp. 345–6. Williamson (ed.), *Old English Riddles*, argues for emendation to 'swa ic', making these lines narrated by an 'I' who stands for the riddle itself (p. 277).

knowledge, rather than life experience, will guide. The riddle says that 'by means of runic letters I can tell in the hall to book-wise ones, the name of those creatures together'. Once the runes are spelled out and transliterated as *n*, *n*, *æ*, *a*, *a*, *h*, and *h*, the names of the (copulating) cock and hen must literally be de-assembled (and decoupled) from overlapping letters into two separate semantic units in order for the reader to be able to properly assemble the two encrypted answers. The decrypting of the runes thus literally intervenes in the figurative union of the cock and hen by taking apart the letters that formed one nonsensical amalgamated body and assembling them into two names.

The intervention at the level of the letter models one desired response at the level of the mind, especially while navigating a chuckle. The symbolically joined bodies of cock and hen are separated by the mind (and possibly hand) of the reader, subjugating them to the mediating act of reading and interpretation. At the end of the riddle, the poem narrates its own answer-giving and announces, 'Nu is undyrne / werum æt wine hu þa wihte mid us, / heanmode twa, hatne sindon' [Now it is unhidden to men at wine how those creatures among us, two low-minded ones, are called]. The final line's use of 'heanmode' echoes the earlier use of 'hæmedlaces', reminding the reader of its association with the feathered twosome. Likewise the reiteration of 'undyrne' (unsecret) in the final sentence recalls 'undearnunga' in the first, yet this time there is a shift in this word's association of unhiddenness with the men at wine. The alliterative path of the letter *h* throughout the riddle traces a similar movement from the animals (the *hæn, hana* and *wiht*) to the openness of the runes ('Hægelas', 'æsc'), to the concealing of a secret ('hygefæste heold heortan') either in the runes or in the heart and mind of the reader (which? 'Hwylc'?), ending with the men decrypting them and showing what the creatures are named ('hatne'). By placing the words 'mid us' (among us) immediately after 'wihte' (creatures) in the final line, the poem allows for a subtle ambiguity in suggesting that the creatures might be situated both grammatically and metaphorically 'among us'. In calling the two (cock and hen) 'heanmode', low-minded, the poem thus metonymically suggests that the creatures could in fact *be* 'among us', if we, the readers, are low-minded, that is, if we allow our mind to be led by the body, especially when 'we' are 'men at wine' and not book-oriented as ideally intended. This riddle's insistence on an 'us' who are part of a book-reading community (but may enjoy an occasional wine-filled laugh) posits an interpreting and literate subject who can distance himself from the creatures' (and his own) sexuality (symbolized by their linguistic bodies) – to the extent of even disentangling

their union – through his literacy.[16] The riddle simultaneously allows the reader to identify the 'low-minded' creatures while reminding him to separate himself from them by recognizing himself as erudite, orienting his head, one assumes, towards the book and the heavens by means of the figurative properties of language.[17] As Wisdom reminds Boethius: 'Of the creator's creatures, man alone goes with his face directed upwards. By that it is signified that his faith and his mind ought to be raised more upwards to heaven than downwards, lest his mind be turned downwards like an animal.'[18] The 'we' is thus potentially divided into 'men at wine' and 'book-wise', making the reader conscious in choosing which ('hwylc') should be empha-sized in his response. Through the riddle's modelling of responsiveness, yet another pair of creatures emerges in addition to the cock and hen and the two potential responders: an 'us' defined by mental and linguistic powers and an orientation away from sexuality, and, by contrast, a 'them' defined by (overly?) responsive bodies, the sexual activity of marriage, and the literal qualities of the letter. Even though this riddle may 'construct sexual and emotional knowledge in approved marital relations, positively' as Melanie Heyworth argues for Exeter Book Riddles 20 and 61, the self-reflexive humour of this riddle also reminds the reader how it marks a difference – and distance – from its subject.[19]

The modelling of responsiveness in Riddle 42 provides one means of understanding its relation to the next one, Riddle 43, body and soul (or mind), both of which are joined as one longer riddle in the manuscript, but are separated by modern editors (in the spirit of the division of the cock and hen, one might think). The riddle reads:

> Ic wat indryhtne   æþelum deorne
> giest in geardum,   þam se grimma ne mæg
> hungor sceððan   ne se hata þurst,
> yldo ne adle.   Gif him arlice
> esne þenð,   se þe agan sceal
> on þam siðfate,   hy gesunde æt ham
> findað witode him   wiste ond blisse,

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16 See Lerer, 'The Riddle and the Book', and a response in Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, pp. 54–62. Although I am using the masculine gender here and elsewhere in referring to the reader of the riddles, in thinking of a monastic audience, I do not rule out other possibilities.

17 On the audience of the Exeter Book, see Lerer, *Literacy and Power*; and Riedinger, 'Formulaic Style'.

18 Godden and Irvine (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius*, Metre 31, vol. II, p. 198.

19 Heyworth, 'Perceptions of Marriage', p. 173.

cnosles unrim,   care, gif se esne
his hlaforde   hyreð yfle,
frean on fore.   Ne wile forht wesan
broþor oþrum;   him þæt bam sceðeð,
þonne hy from bearme   begen hweorfað
anre magan   ellorfuse,
moddor ond sweostor.   Mon, se þe wille,
cyþe cynewordum   hu se cuma hatte,
eðþa se esne,   þe ic her ymb sprice.

[I know a noble guest, virtuous and excellent, in a dwelling, whom fierce hunger cannot harm, nor fiery thirst, nor old age, nor disease. If the man who keeps him honourably attends him as a servant on their journey, they will find, safe at their destination, appointed to them sustenance and happiness, innumerable kin; it will be sorrow, if the man badly obeys his Lord and Master upon the journey, or will not live in fear of the other brother; the latter will injure them both when they both depart from the breast of their only kinswoman, eager for the journey, their mother and sister. Let the man who wishes to reveal in fitting words what the visitor is called, or the man, of whom I have spoken about here.][20]

Given the crossover between these two riddles, as James E. Anderson has remarked, the 'scribe seems to have acknowledged the joint themes with a sly graphic trick of his own: he copied both riddles as one text but also "separated" them with a bold raised point and a somewhat elongated capital in the middle of a manuscript line'.[21] Having found the solution to Riddle 42, the reader has already figuratively 'mastered' a relation to the bodies of the cock and hen (and to their human counterparts) via the mind and (having perhaps used a hand – in the dust on the ground, as S. A. J. Bradley suggested – to graphically assemble the letters) has been reminded as to the desired ordering of mind over matter, both bodily and linguistic, and how they should cohabit with one another.[22] As Niles has noted of riddles in general, 'the riddles not only present objects in anthropomorphic guise: they arrange them in anthropocentric systems of order'.[23] In parallel fashion, the mastery of the body is reiterated in Riddle 43, this time in more explicit terms, emphasizing how the body *should respond* to its higher counterpart, its 'hlaforde' and 'frean' [lord and

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20 Treharne (ed. and trans.), *Old and Middle English*, p. 73, with modifications.
21 J. E. Anderson, *Two Literary Riddles*, p. 23.
22 Bradley (trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 377.
23 Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, p. 54.

master], the soul.[24] The body, disguised as an 'esne' [man or servant], must keep his noble guest honourably, serve him, and fear retaliation after death should he disobey his superior counterpart, as is exemplified in the Exeter Book's *Soul and Body II* in which the body, having lost its responsiveness, becomes mute and deaf to the soul. Unlike Riddle 42, in which the descriptive and figurative copulation transpires before the reader's eyes, Riddle 43 emphasizes conditional tenses and proscribes future behaviour in a moralizing and gendered tone, marked grammatically by the repeated structure 'if . . . then' ('gif . . . se', 4–5, 8). The answer to Riddle 42, 'cock and hen', is therefore but one step in a series of responses. The reader's response to Riddle 42 becomes a prototype for modelling how the body and mind should respond to one another, and while the 'solution' is an essential part of responding, it may also be the beginning of a longer dialogue in which literacy is but a first step. This dialogue may, for example, ultimately engage reflections on the relation of literacy to the soul, on the powers of language in relation to those of the body, on the thematic and structural relation of riddles to other texts in the Exeter Book, or on the uses of reading and memory in settings beyond the manuscript page. What one may eventually read in the 'wondrous' cock and hen could serve to encode future responsiveness: the figures of cock and hen may easily double as mnemonic devices for moral behaviour, like the tropological way of reading scripture.[25] While interpreting riddles should not be confounded with exegesis, they do require an ability to read symbolically and interpretively in connection with the surrounding world, as do many texts in the Exeter Book, such as *The Gifts of Men*, *Maxims*, *The Ruin* and the *Physiologus*.

The *Physiologus*, three descriptive poems of a whale, a panther and a bird (often described as a partridge), couple wonder with moral teaching.[26] The third poem begins with a formula paralleling those of the riddles: 'Hyrde ic

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24 J. E. Anderson has also remarked that Riddle 42 'plays on widely distributed folklore motifs of the cock and hen as both flesh and spiritual marriage partners. The riddlic word *orþoncbendum*, "bonds of skillful thought" then links the copulating cock and hen in the implicit farmyard of Riddle 42 to the nobler marriage of "body and soul" figuratively confined *in geardum* – that is, within the nature of Man – in Riddle 43' (*Two Literary Riddles*, p. 23).

25 The cock and hen may also serve symbolically as aids for reading *types* in other literary texts. In his reading of this riddle, Bitterli emends 'heanmode' to 'heahmode', haughty, since 'Such a negative trait recalls the stereotyped characterizations of classical and medieval natural history and beast poetry, where the rooster and the hen are portrayed as boastful and salacious animals, behaving like haughty and shameless people' (*Say What I Am Called*, pp. 123–4). One can, however, read the riddle as a conscious comment on this literary tradition, showing how the haughty are instead literally low-minded, their heads oriented towards the ground.

26 On interpretation and the Old English *Physiologus* see Letson, 'Old English *Physiologus*'; and Rossi-Reder, 'Beasts and Baptism'.

secgan gen bi sumum fugle / wundorlicne' [I have heard told at length of a certain wonderful bird]. Like many riddles, the creatures here are not necessarily known through direct experience, but are known through literary contexts, possibly by means of the tradition of the physiologus or the riddle tradition itself. Like *The Phoenix*, another feathered creature that appears in the Exeter Book, riddles do not always require *experience* of the objects or situations in question, rather they require that one experience them *through reading* and be able to understand their multivalent existences in conjunction with their ability to be represented in other forms. For example, Patrick Murphy reads Riddle 17 as referencing the riddler par excellence, Samson, and the lion and bees witnessed in Judges 12:14, hence Murphy's suggestion of the answer *leo* and *beo*.[27] In her reading of Riddle 9, a riddle that features another feathered creature, the cuckoo, Jennifer Neville emphasizes that 'the audience need not have included assiduous bird-watchers to recognize the cuckoo', for 'the cuckoo's natural history was a famous *story*'.[28] For Neville, the *Partridge* provides a fruitful analogue for the moral teachings of the cuckoo. She concludes her reading of the riddle by suggesting that 'Decoding the anthropomorphic disguise worn by the cuckoo is not the end of the story. Rather, it is the beginning of another story. Thus, if we do not discard the supposedly disposable image when we "solve" the riddle as "cuckoo", the text can reveal social commentary' and provide a means for modelling moral response.[29] The mystery in a riddle need not be dissolved with an answer – it may equally sustain interpretation and responsiveness beyond the manuscript page.

Answers do not mark an end-point. They begin a process of revealing *and* producing infinite layers of relation between man and his surrounding world. As many have noted, riddles not only generate answers as responses, they also generate questions on the relation of cognition, knowledge and language, heightening an awareness of the overarching influence of language upon perception and the patterning of thought. Craig Williamson suggests that the reflexivity involved in reading and solving riddles mimics how reality itself is built on verbal foundations. He writes, 'What [riddles] mean is the riddle-solver's meaning. What they mean is that reality exists and is at the same time a mosaic of man's perception. What they mean is that man's measure of the world is in words, that perceptual categories are built on verbal foundations, and that by withholding the key to the categorical house (the entitling solution) the riddlers may force the riddle-solver to restructure his own

27 P. J. Murphy, '*Leo ond beo*'.
28 Neville, 'Fostering the Cuckoo', p. 434.
29 *Ibid.*, pp. 434–5.

perceptual blocks in order to gain entry to a metaphorical truth.'[30] Williamson's claim that the process of answering the riddle involves a 'restructuring' of the reader's mind and an awareness of the underpinnings of language in the construction of reality, would align the thematic elements of wonder, awe and mystery so prevalent in the narrative of riddles with the desired condition of the riddle-seeker. As language becomes more and more conspicuous in the determination of how the world is ordered and perceived, so too does it paradoxically distance man from knowing the essence of things in themselves, leaving their mystery intact. A microcosmic *mise en abyme*, what is unknown in the riddle would thus foreshadow and even mirror the unknown and perhaps unknowable in man and creation at large. The next part of this chapter pursues this insight, looking at the relation between language, naming knowing and the unknown, exploring the effects of sustaining wonder and mystery in responding to riddles and other Anglo-Saxon texts.

Naming and unknowing

The urge to name, to identify something linguistically, is a response essential to riddles. The formulas 'say what I am called' or 'find out what I am called' used at the conclusion of many of the Exeter Book riddles highlight the medium of verbal exchange: what is cloaked in language is promised (but not always given) a clearer form and figure with a word. At the most fundamental level, all riddles elicit linguistic answers, whether they be spoken or silently imagined. The language of the riddle often conditions the language of response. Habitually, Latin riddles, like those of Alcuin, Aldhelm, Boniface, Eusebius, Tatwine, the Pseudo-Bede in his *Collectanea* or the anonymous Bern and Lorsch collections, produce Latin responses.[31] Old English riddles usually produce a response in Old English; however, in the Exeter Book riddles (of which ninety or ninety-four, depending on how one counts them, are in Old English and one in Latin), this correspondence is occasionally altered.[32] Several riddles host runic and Latinate clues, calling for additional

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30 Williamson (ed.), *Old English Riddles*, p. 25.

31 For the Lorsch riddles, and the Bern riddles (also known as the *Enigmata Tullii*), see Glorie (ed.), *Variae collectiones aenigmatum*, pp. 345–58 and 542–610 respectively. For further discussion of the early medieval Latin riddles, see Chapter 5 above.

32 The total number of riddles is a source of debate. Williamson and others have argued that several riddles (1–3, 68–9, 75–6, 79–80) are continuations or should be divided (30, 70) thus making 91 total, as opposed to 96, as Krapp and Dobbie have numbered them. Many scholars believe the original total may have been 100, following the example of the enigmas of Symphosius and the *Enigmata* of Aldhelm.

decrypting in linguistic code.[33] Pointing to what he calls the more 'learned' riddles, John Niles argues that 'the possibility should not be ruled out that certain riddles were designed to be answered in Latin even if posed in the vernacular'; and, inversely, Craig Williamson notes that the one Latin riddle in the Exeter Book, Riddle 86, may involve wordplay on the Old English word *wulflys* (fleece of wool), suggesting an interlingual exercise.[34] Tony Perello has highlighted a similar exercise in a single riddle in the manuscript Brussels, Bibliothèque Royal, MS 1828–1830, in wordplay between the Latin *rus* (field) and the Old English *hus* (house), which he links to a scribe influenced by Ælfric's *Grammar*.[35] Given the presence of Greek in this manuscript, he suggests that the scribe may also have had exposure to, if not an informed interest in, Greek words and etymologies, making a final pun on the name *Philomela*. This emphasis on language – or languages – brings to the fore the way in which responsiveness is not only associated with naming objects, but with exercises within and across languages, making language itself, and not only objects, the focus.

Riddle 60 ('reed-pen') reflects explicitly on the paradoxes and powers of language. In adopting the first-person voice, as do many riddles, a reed-pen marvels at its own fortune at being transformed into a vessel for language. While a reed-pen in itself may not be wondrous, what the riddle highlights is the wondrous nature of writing and silent speech; language can circulate silently both with and without its human counterparts close at hand. In her reading Marie Nelson notes that the qualities of language provide the pen with the means for a self-reflexive source of wonder:

>   Lyt ic wende
> þæt ic ær oþþe sið æfre sceolde
> ofer meodubence muðleas sprecan,
> wordum wrixlan. þæt is wundres dæl,
> on sefan searolic þam þe swylc ne conn,
> hu mec seaxes ord ond seo swiþre hond,
> eorles ingeþonc ond ord somod,
> þingum geþydan, þæt ic wiþ þe sceolde
> for unc anum twam ærendspræce

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33 Riddles use runes in runic or roman script (10, 19, 24, 36, 42, 58, 64, 75), numeric symbols (13, 22, 36, 86, 90) and runic symbols for abbreviation (5, 91), as do other poems in the Exeter Book, such as *The Ruin* and *The Husband's Message*.

34 Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, p. 103, note 5; Williamson (ed.), *Old English Riddles*, p. 385.

35 Perello, 'Undiscovered Riddle'.

abeodan bealdlice,   swa hit beorna ma
uncre wordcwidas   widdor ne mænden.   (7b–17)

[Little did I expect that I, soon or late, should ever over the mead bench mouthless speak, exchange words. That is a matter for wonder, marvellous to the mind of him who does not understand such things, how the point of the knife and the right hand, the man's intention and the point at the same time should join in purpose, so that I to you, for us two alone, should boldly relate an errand-speech in a way that other men do not more widely tell our spoken words.][36]

Nelson continues, 'The speaker's response to the wonder of it all seems most genuine, and, considering the paradoxes involved, justified. An inanimate being speaks, and the speech is, in effect at least, silent to everyone but the intended receiver. If language itself can be seen as a kind of miracle, the wonder is greater when a subject that does not seem to have the capacity for speech communicates.'[37] Like Riddle 42, the hand is invoked, yet this time explicitly in relation to the inner thought or intention ('ingeþonc') of the man, once again highlighting how language paradoxically exteriorizes the most private and potentially secretive part of a person: the inner self, or mind.

In Riddle 39, one of the more challenging riddles of the Exeter Book, which, as I noted in the opening of this chapter, has generated a plethora of solutions, language again comes to the fore. The relation of naming to knowing – or the lack therof – is highlighted in the negative assertions repeated in the sentence structure of the riddle. The riddle begins by drawing attention to the medium of language and makes a number of positive assertions about the 'creature': 'Gewritu secgað þæt seo wiht sy / mid moncynne miclum tidum / sweotol ond gesyne' [Writings say that the creature is with mankind at many times, distinct and seen]. It is subsequently described as having powers beyond man's perception, seeking each living being separately, then fleeing to go on a path of exile. While the riddle begins by making an affirmation about the creature's presence and powers, in the lines that follow, the riddle's use of rhetoric and negative patterning aligns a form of negativity in speech with a negativity in perception and knowledge: 'Ne hafað hio fot ne folme, ne æfre foldan hran / ne eagena ægþer twega, ne muð hafaþ, ne wiþ monnum spræc / ne gewit hafað, ac gewritu secgað / þæt seo sy earmost ealra wihta' [It has neither foot nor hand, nor did it ever touch the ground, nor either of two eyes, nor does it have a mouth, nor did it speak with men, nor does it have knowledge, but writings

36 Trans. M. Nelson, 'Paradox of Silent Speech', p. 613.
37 Ibid.

say that it is the least of all creatures]. Nelson has observed that 'negative assertions are more numerous than positive ones in *ne . . . ac* patterns, and, because the concluding positive seemingly contradicts the negative assertions that precede it, the pattern produces an additional degree of ambiguity'. Here, she notes, arguing for the solution 'death': 'rhetoric serves the riddle's purpose of ambiguous description particularly well by giving form to a subject not merely unknown but *actually* unknowable and hence most difficult to describe'.[38] Regardless of the chosen answer, in forcing us to think through the means of how we come to know the creature described in language, this riddle, like many others, highlights a link between a limit in epistemological knowing and a limit inscribed in naming. Naming might simulate or effectuate mastery in language, it may posit a way to respond to things, mentally and physically, as is the case with Riddle 42, but it does not endow human beings with a full-fledged knowledge of creatures or creation itself. In reflecting on periphrasis in riddles and kennings, Adam Davis provides a particularly helpful insight, demonstrating how 'implied comparisons . . . shift perceptual categories so that a thing may be understood in a new light', resulting in 'an awareness that to name a thing is not only not the same as knowing it, but may interfere with our coming to know it'.[39] Responding to a riddle and naming an object might mimic a certain process of coming to know things in the surrounding world either directly or through literary precedents, yet naming the object of the riddle does not divulge the mystery it evokes. If responsiveness is thus conceived of as both relying on and producing patterns in thought and language, patterns that mediate affect with cognitive skill, patterns, for example, that allow for an object to be both nameable *and* potentially mysterious or enigmatic at one and the same time, then the riddles may exhibit a pedagogic method that is not exclusive to this genre and may represent a particular use of wonder in Anglo-Saxon England.

Wonder, discourse and disposition

In her study of wonder in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Caroline Walker Bynum categorizes wonder discourses in a way that helps highlight the particularities of Anglo-Saxon wonder I am examining here. Bynum identifies three different general discourses of wonder: the first is the theological-scholastic use of wonder, which opposes *scientia* to *admiratio*.

38 M. Nelson, 'Rhetoric of the Exeter Book Riddles', p. 430.
39 A. Davis, 'Agon and Gnomon', p. 131.

Wonder initiates the sequence of *admiratio*, *questio*, *investigatio* and *inventio* (wonder, questioning, investigation and discovery), but once knowledge is 'achieved', wonder is dissolved and replaced by the discovered form of knowing: 'philosophers between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries developed from the opening of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which associated wonder with ignorance and doubt, the idea that the goal of *admiratio* was its own destruction; if wonder arose from the desire to seek causes it did not understand, wonder should lead to its own replacement by knowledge (*scientia*) or *philosophia*'.[40] The second form of wonder Bynum identifies is religious in effect and is found in sermons and saints' Lives, wherein *admiratio* marks the uniqueness of the saint, his or her holy stature. In this instance, *admiratio* is often opposed to *imitatio* (imitation, or copying), in that it marks the saints' unapproachable singularity and divine likeness.[41] The third general category she identifies involves the genres of history writing, travel accounts and story collections which invoke the marvellous. This third category is a form of literary entertainment which might include *fabulae* (stories) and have a fictive claim on the registers of truth to which they attest, using wonder as a way to enhance curiosity and the feeling of the strange. This kind of story collection 'drew on the encyclopaedic tradition of the ancient world known as paradoxology – the collection of oddities (including monsters or hybrids, distant races, marvelous lands) – and on antique notions of portents or omens'.[42] These three 'discourses' with their varying degrees of complexity and overlap provide ways for thinking of wonder as it is used in the Exeter Book riddles and as they in turn relate to and differ from other Anglo-Saxon texts, several of which I will address here.

The second kind of wonder discourse Bynum identifies, in religious discourse, is common to both Latin and vernacular Anglo-Saxon texts, and often invokes the wondrous as a sign of exemplary and inimitable holiness. The wonders seen, for example, in Ælfric's *Life of St Cuthbert* are so numerous that they become narratively cumbersome, distinguishing the saint in hyperbolic fashion from the common man. In this instance, wonder marks work that emanates from the saint, in life and beyond, in body and in soul, but clearly originates in the divine itself. Ælfric writes, quasi-apologetically, 'Fela wundra wurdon geworhte ðurh ðone halgan cuðberht. ac we wyllað for sceortnysse sume forsuwian. ðy læs ðe ðeos racu eow to lang ðince' [Many wonders were worked through holy Cuthbert, but we will for brevity's sake conceal

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40 Bynum, 'Wonder'.
41 Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 43.
42 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

some lest you think this narrative is too long].[43] The story of St Edmund shares one particular feature with the riddles' use of wonder, however, in that the work of the divine is not only visible in the saint, in soul and body during his life, but the head of St Edmund remains responsive after death. Ælfric of Eynsham's Anglo-Saxon version of Abbo of Fleury's *Martyrdom of St Edmund* recounts the search for the head of the martyred king:

> Hi eodon þa secende, and symle clypigende, swa swa hit gewunelic is þam ðe on wuda gað oft, 'Hwær eart þu nu gefera?' And him andwyrde þæt heafod, 'her, her, her' and swa gelome clypode andswarigende him eallum, swa oft swa heora ænig clypode, oþþæt hi ealle becomen þurh ða clypunga him to.

> [Then they went looking and continually calling, as is customary with those who often go into the woods, 'Where are you now, friend?' and the head answered them: 'Here! Here! Here!' and so frequently called out, answering them all as often as any of them shouted, so that they all came to it because of the shouting.][44]

While this emphasis on responsiveness in the saint is clearly not transferable to the ordinary human being, it nevertheless points to one figure of how the divine may work through the human: via a responsive soul or body, which, in the case of a saint, may in turn respond to prayer and to 'friends', producing miracles after death.

The third form of wonder identified by Bynum is perhaps the one most readily associated with the Anglo-Saxon texts called *The Wonders of the East* and *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, both of which precede the poem *Beowulf* in London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A. xv, and which provide two very different kinds of account of unusual creatures encountered in foreign lands.[45] Both texts share a meticulous concern with measure and proportion, providing the guise of verisimilitude for what seem, each in its own way, fabulous accounts of an imagined 'elsewhere'. Likewise, each text encodes a response to wonder within its own narrative or pictorial frame: As John Block Friedman has noted in relation to the *Wonders*, 'One of the most important characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon Wonders texts and their illustrations is that

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43 Ælfric, *Vita sancti Cuthberti*, in *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, p. 84 (translation mine). K. Davis has also suggested that brevity in these homilies may be related to the status of the miracle in the post-apostolic period ('Boredom, Brevity and Last Things').
44 Treharne (ed. and trans.), *Old and Middle English*, p. 137.
45 There are two other manuscripts of *The Wonders of the East*, one in London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius B. v, in both Latin and Old English, the other in the early twelfth-century manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 614, in Latin only.

the races are seen in some sort of relationship to the viewer, rather than in the isolation of an empty frame.'[46] Some illustrated creatures in the manuscripts literally leap out of the frame, repeating the feeling of inadequacy of reference in relation to the object viewed. While unusual creatures abound in both the *Wonders* and in the riddles, in the latter, curiosity is a prelude to further reflection. The creatures of the *Wonders* may be wondrous, in that they are novel and surpass ordinary experience, but their wonder is an end in and of itself; it is not sustained in the ordinary, as it resides 'elsewhere'.

The ethos surrounding wonder in *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* differs from that of the riddles in that for Alexander, 'marveling at diversity [is] the prelude to appropriation'.[47] The *Letter* is itself framed as a response from Alexander to his mentor Aristotle about wonders witnessed in those worlds he aims to conquer. Alexander's letter is, on the one hand, a report on his conquest, but the text also harbours overtones on the relation between wonder and the desire for appropriation. Unlike the more modest ethos implicit in the riddles, in which the riddle-seeker is divested of the means to fully 'own' the object, throughout the story of the *Letter* Alexander seeks out wondrous things (moon-headed crocodiles, mysterious and deadly caves, seemingly solid pillars of gold) and performs various feats of mastery of them. In the letter, Alexander narrates his encounters with unknown or wondrous creatures, peoples and lands according to a paradigm that couples visual awe with a curious form of penetration and direction. After 'overtaking and conquering Porus with wondrous swiftness' ('Ond we þa mid wunderlicre hreðnisse Porrum þone cyning ofercwomon und oferswyðdon'), Alexander stands in awe at his gold-filled palace with gold-plated walls.[48] In a typical gesture repeated throughout the text, he seeks to authenticate the plated surface of the walls and does so by measuring the gold in relation to the thickness of a finger ('mid gyldnum þelum anæglede fingres þicce'), measuring the marvels according to human dimensions.[49] Not only does Alexander attempt to amass wondrous things, but in doing so he becomes a source of wonder himself. He operates with 'wunderlicre hreðnisse' [marvellous speed], and is constantly

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46 Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, p. 144.
47 Bynum, 'Wonder'.
48 References to the Old English *Letter* are to Rypins (ed.), *Three Old English Prose Texts*, and A. Orchard (ed. and trans.), *Liber monstrorum*, pp. 225–53. I first cite the Old English text from Rypins's edition with folio and line number, then Orchard's paragraph with my added line number. *Letter*, fol. 109, 4–6 (§8.2).
49 *Ibid.*, fol. 109b, 6–7 (§8.14).

reflecting on the creatures he encounters, incorporating wonders into his mental and material repertoire as he amasses the substance of his own legend.[50] While he is also clearly fascinated with the power of language, with its wondrous ability to play with presence and absence, to simultaneously conceal and reveal as Susan Kim has highlighted, all of Alexander's encounters with the wondrous are occasion for the manipulation of wonder, assimilating it to human measure, however extraordinary his particular person.[51] Throughout the *Letter*, the verbal form of wonder – 'ic wundrade' or 'ic wundrode' (or the plural 'wundredon hie'), meaning I wondered, marvelled, or was amazed at – signals Alexander's eventual incorporation of wonder from the outside in. He tames it, tests it, uses it strategically, and ultimately turns it into a reflection of his greatness by means of forceful mastery and incorporation. Alexander's response to wonder therefore ultimately contrasts with responsiveness to wonder in the riddles. As sign of marvellous exteriority, wonder in the *Letter* is constantly appropriated and used, caught up in a verbal and material economy whose only excess is the desire to possess wonder on the part of Alexander himself. While the desire to know is echoed by the use of wonder in the riddles, the ends of knowledge fundamentally differ.

The first category Bynum describes (which I have saved for last) requires a slight yet significant modification when applied to Anglo-Saxon England, especially in relation to the use of knowledge and wisdom in the riddles. Unlike the first discourse of wonder, that is, the later medieval scholastic and university traditions that oppose knowledge or *scientia* to the affect of *admiratio*, the Exeter Book riddles pair the wondrous with the linguistic way of knowing an object. The riddles exemplify an approach to knowledge and wisdom characteristic of Anglo-Saxon England that invokes wonder to effect a salutary ordering of the relation of a person (and this person's mind) to the surrounding world, as is the case in the Old English Boethius. In the riddles, wonder coupled with curiosity becomes a lure for knowing something, for inquiring after *what* an object is or *how* an object can appear as many different things, according to the human and linguistic means of being familiar with and naming something. In contrast to Alexander, however, wonder serves to entice the riddle-seeker *and* make apparent the limitations of the mind. In his study of the history of wonder, Dennis Quinn reminds us, 'It is frequently forgotten that wonder arises not from ignorance but from consciousness of ignorance', and that 'the only way one can profitably flee from ignorance is by

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50 *Ibid.*, fol. 109, 5 (§8.2).
51 Kim, 'If One Who Is Loved'.

desiring and attempting to know'.[52] The riddles couple the language of wonder with naming, inquiring after, making, birthing, speaking, seeing and being a thing. Whether it is a chalice, jug, key, magpie or Bible, all are invested with a sense of awe. Unlike Alexander's conquest, the scale of wonder starts with the microcosmic, the familiar, that which would not necessarily be 'marvellous' at first sight. A reed-pen, for example, does not immediately transfix the gaze as do the 'moon-headed crocodiles' encountered by Alexander; the reed-pen requires the framing of the riddle to highlight a mystery that is not manifest at first glance but requires language to narrate and understand its fabulous nature. Thus, even when 'solved', the riddles sustain or generate new mystery while simultaneously dissipating that of the question of the name. When Riddles 18, 20, 24 and 25 begin 'Ic eom wunder-licu wiht' [I am a wondrous creature] or Riddle 87, 'Ic seah wundorlice wiht' [I saw a wondrous creature], wonder is ushered in along with the search for an appropriate name or word. The aura of the wondrous or marvellous ('wraetlic' or 'wunderlicu') which explicitly accompanies the creatures or creaturely things described in a significant number of riddles (18, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29, 31, 33, 36, 39, 40, 42, 44, 47, 50, 51, 55, 59, 60, 67, 68, 69, 70, 83, 84, 87, 88) is not meant to inhibit or stop the reader's engagement – to the contrary, whatever limit the wondrous invokes is there to urge the reader on in his linguistic pursuit. Although a word or a name may be co-substantial with a way of knowing, it does not, I have argued, master or reveal the entire nature of the object itself. The true and whole nature of things, of *wihta* or creatures, in the Christian Anglo-Saxon world, is only knowable by divinity itself. Wonder may therefore accompany the means of or desire for producing a certain kind of linguistic craft or knowledge; however, it also marks the inability to know an object fully, in the epistemological sense. Wonder persists beyond the answer, beyond language, beyond what we can know. The riddle itself models a form of responsiveness *as* wondrous: it narrates a way of seeing something that may itself be ordinary but, when transposed into the riddle-form, is *wraetlic*, providing a new order for the mind to perceive, read and imitate. The poetic language of the riddles becomes the means for enchanting different forms of creation, for imbuing things with a wonder proper to them, and for reorienting the mind with a proper disposition and responsiveness to the surrounding world. As Boryslawski has pointed out:

> Riddles are to a great extent concerned ... with creating new continua of logic, which however, just like Bakhtin's carnival, are based on the already

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52 Quinn, *Iris Exiled*, pp. 19–20.

established and existing systems. The aim of such riddles is not, however, to destroy but rather to construct anew, to stimulate fresh perception, to defamiliarize in order to portray the world in a novel, breathtaking way, eventually leading to a sensation similar to Aristotelian *anagnorisis*, that is a change from ignorance to knowledge.[53]

Like a passage from ignorance to knowledge, but not quite, the riddles orchestrate a subtle awareness of a limit in language and knowledge. Passing from a presumed knowing like that of the 'þoncol' man addressed in the beginning of this chapter, to profound unknowing and disorientation, to knowing something differently, in a contingent fashion, the riddle-seeker emerges with a sense of awe. While the challenge of the Exeter Book riddles as a whole to produce answers might induce a degree of discomfort in their readers, evoking a coercion that may mimic a tortuous aspect of monastic education ('forcing' their readers to think by 'imposing' patterns), they invite play in a disciplined setting in order to sustain well-earned wonder and delight. Riddles are not only an exercise in naming, they are an exercise in responding to the world and to the unknowable – not with fright or stupor, like those who witness miracles in Mark 6:51 – but with an appropriate and nuanced disposition, and even a bemused smile.

As I have emphasized, riddles cultivate responses that interpret, but do not entirely capture, their object. Rhetorically speaking, this means that riddles do not seek to dismiss the object and annihilate the material referent in favour of its linguistic representation, but rather seek what Wesley Yu has characterized as an exegetical flight and return to its object, characteristic of Carolingian attitudes towards language and allegory.[54] In not dismissing the literal term, the object itself, the Exeter Book riddles reinvest the object itself with the long path of associations and wonder, allowing us to perceive things *alongside* the hermeneutic means of coming to discover them in language. After all is said and done, the riddles do not do away with their literal objects, as would an Augustinian theory of poetic language which subsumes the object to its higher immaterial representation in language; rather, the riddle transforms the object only to reinvest the object itself with a found strangeness and mystery, its truer way of cohabiting in the world.

In conclusion, the riddles offer ample substance for reflection on the relation of wonder, language, knowing and things. The most compelling rationale for the coupling of the marvellous or wonder with riddles is, as I have argued, not

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53 Boryslawski, *Old English Riddles*, p. 22.
54 Yu, 'Early Medieval Allegory', p. 544. Yu is addressing Eriugena's *Periphyseon*, but applies it to Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards objects.

merely as a rhetorical means of obfuscation, but rather as a means for teaching something other than the right answer, perhaps for teaching *how* things may be wondrous if perceived in and responded to in nuanced fashion. As Dennis Quinn has observed, in early Christian and non-Christian cultures wonder does not come naturally, rather, it must be taught or restored to the mind, as is the case for Boethius:

> the common wisdom held that in things themselves there abides an irreducible enigma that by exceeding our grasp begets a continuous searching wonder. This long-enduring tradition, however, did not conceive of wonder as an instinctive response that could be taken for granted but as an appetite hard to keep, easily dulled, and sometimes altogether lost, even by the wisest of men. Such was the case of Boethius.[55]

The Old English Boethius may be the most akin to the riddles' 'genre' of wonder discourses, as I have outlined them here, as different as their respective forms may be. Like riddles, wisdom in the Old English Boethius finds its purpose in terms of reorienting the mind's relation to its surroundings through linguistic means: through speech and song. Boethius is taught how to perceive the world properly, to restore wonder by means of adopting a proper mental disposition towards worldly things. When Boethius listens to Wisdom in prison as he awaits execution, the content of speech and language itself offers reason for comfort and delight. Boethius' response turns from an initial fear and resistance to wisdom, to wonder and reflection through the 'medicine' ('læcedom', literally 'leechdom') of verbal teaching in prose and song:

> þa se wisdom þa ðis lioð asungen hæfde, þa hæfde he me gebundenne mid þære wynsumnesse his sanges þæt ic his wæs swiðe wafiende and swiðe lustbære to geheranne mid innewearde mode. And þa ful hræðe ðæs ic cleopode to him and þus cwæð. Eala wisdom þu ðe eart sio hehste frofr ealra werigra moda, hu ðu me hæfst afrefredne ægþer ge mid þinre smealican spræce ge mid þinre wynsumnesse þines sanges . . . Ac ic wolde ymbe þone læcedom þara þinra lara hwene mare geheran. Þeah þu nu hwene ær sæde þæt þu wende þæt hi wolden me swiðe bitere þincan, ne ondræde ic hi me nu nauht.

> [When Wisdom had sung this song, he had captivated me with the pleasure of his song so that I was greatly amazed at it and very willing to hear it with inner mind. And then very quickly after that I addressed him and said as follows: 'O Wisdom, you who are the highest comfort of all weary minds, how you have comforted me both with your penetrating speech and the sweetness of your song . . . But I would like to hear a little more about the

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55 Quinn, '*Me auidiendi . . . stupentem*', pp. 447–8.

medicine of your teachings. Though you said a little while ago that you thought that they would seem very bitter to me, I do not fear them at all now.][56]

Boethius is taught by Wisdom how to see, perceive, think and modify his disposition towards the world. Although fear is not a dominant part of the riddles' vocabulary, in both cases the ordering of the universe comes into fuller perspective as the changing nature of the world's creations gives way to a greater design. Creatures become a source of admirable ordering, an order that is ultimately applicable to the mind itself: 'Oh God of victories, this human race would be greatly blessed if their minds could be securely controlled and organized through that strong power just as other worldly creatures are.'[57]

While we have not yet begun to understand the 'logic' that may propel riddles, what kind of philosophy may haunt their midst, what kind of rhyme or reason makes riddles reside in the Exeter Book alongside some of the most enigmatic and beautiful of Old English poems like *The Seafarer*, *The Wanderer*, *Deor* and *The Wife's Lament*, these kinds of question will undoubtedly continue to riddle future research.

56 Godden and Irvine (eds. and trans.), *Old English Boethius*, vol. I, pp. 432–3 (trans. vol II, pp. 128–9).
57 *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 128.

III

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LATIN LEARNING AND THE LITERARY VERNACULARS

In measure, and number, and weight:
writing science

R. M. LIUZZA

None of the practices by which modern science defines itself – the collection of empirical data, the formulation of explanatory hypotheses, rigorous testing, replicable experiments – existed in any systematic form in early medieval England. There was no scientific community founded on these shared principles and no institutional structure dedicated to 'science' that certified its practitioners and upheld its standards. The philosophical postulates on which post-Newtonian science rests, such as the assumption that physical laws are uniform and consistent across time and space, were not formulated and would not necessarily have been accepted. Neither the empiricism of Aristotelian natural science nor the methods of Euclidean geometry – the reduction of the irregular *realia* of experience to a brilliantly clear chain of axioms, postulates and proofs – was available to the Anglo-Saxons. For these reasons most histories of science, tracing the roots of a modern idea, pass quickly over a period so apparently alien to their interests.

And yet the mental habits on which science depends – curiosity, speculation, the trial-and-error of experimentation, the application of experiential knowledge to the manipulation of the material world – certainly existed in Anglo-Saxon England, as they have existed in most times and places. If scientific texts were generally scarce, traditional knowledge and skills were plentiful. Whatever skills and knowledge individuals may have possessed, improved and transmitted, however – in agriculture, engineering, metallurgy, astronomy or physiology – do not seem to have existed within a theoretical framework, or rather their theoretical framework was not generally an object of inquiry in itself. Much of this knowledge served as a means to a practical end – how to build, grow, cure, tell time; it might be characterized as craft rather than science, 'knowing how' rather than 'knowing why' or 'knowing

about'.[1] The separation of craft and industry from the centres of education and the learned traditions where classical texts were known foreclosed one of the most fruitful venues of exchange for the development of a scientific method in later centuries.

There were, certainly, individuals possessed of the kind of inventive curiosity that a later century would call 'scientific'. William of Malmesbury records the story of Eilmer, an elderly monk of Malmesbury at the time of the Conquest, who in his youth had fastened wings to his hands and feet, and leaping from a tower had flown more than a furlong (around 200 metres) before crosswinds, fear and, in his own opinion, the lack of tail-feathers caused him to crash, breaking his legs and leaving him permanently lame.[2] Such a dramatic endeavour, however ill-conceived, requires a speculative and inquisitive frame of mind. But what is perhaps most revealing in this story is the fact that Eilmer was motivated not by the observation of birds in flight or by a theory of aerodynamics, but by the story of Daedalus (presumably from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book VIII); his curiosity was aroused by his reading of literature, not his study of the world around him. Authority enhanced by antiquity, rather than observation or experience, was the source of true knowledge. This deference to textual authority, like the separation of craft and learning, precluded the development of anything like a modern 'scientific' culture in the early Middle Ages. There was ample warrant for observation of and speculation on nature and the universe: the Book of Genesis begins with an account of the creation of the cosmos, and the Psalmist states that 'the heavens proclaim the Glory of God' (Psalm 18: 1). Investigation into natural phenomena was by no means prohibited by Christian belief. But since authoritative accounts of the world and its origins could already be found in the Bible and its commentaries, and classical or vernacular alternatives to these accounts were fragmented and generally incoherent, those who thought deeply on such matters naturally tended to seek confirmation of these accounts in the world around them, not to subject the accounts themselves to scrutiny or construct different accounts of their own.

The Bible, though authoritative, was not encyclopaedic; knowledge of the more mundane world was obtained from classical literature, or more often from the late authors such as Boethius and Isidore of Seville who collected and condensed more ancient works at the end of the Roman age. The result was a sort of dismantled and incoherent classical natural philosophy. Isidore's

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1 Crombie, *Medieval and Early Modern Science*, pp. 18–25.
2 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, vol. II, p. 13; see White, Jr, 'Eilmer of Malmesbury'.

Etymologiae, for example, draws on a library of earlier authors including Lucretius, Lactantius, Pliny, Celsus, Cassiodorus and Martianus Capella;[3] he liberally cites, often verbatim, their pronouncements on the liberal arts, cosmology, geography, agriculture, minerals, medicine and many other topics, but separates this knowledge piecemeal into a thousand shards of information that discouraged the construction of a coherent view of the nature of the world. In this, however, Isidore is not much different from Pliny, whose *Natural History* is itself an enormous collage of facts and fables from other sources. In many respects medieval science simply continued trends already evident in Roman science – a preference for practice over theory and useful knowledge over abstract speculation, an impulse towards the anthology and encyclopaedia, a reliance on the work of earlier thinkers over original research, and a taste for narrative rather than systematic organization.

The measure of time

The one subject that received sustained serious abstract thought in the early Middle Ages was the art of reckoning time to construct a more precise calendar, known as computus. Calendars are so ubiquitous as to be nearly invisible today, but their creation requires mathematical skill, accurate observation, knowledge of traditions and Church doctrine, some experience with astronomy and a basic understanding of the structure of the cosmos; computus became the vehicle for the transmission and development of most of the types of discourse a modern reader would recognize as 'scientific'. Computists were fond of pointing out that God 'ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight' (Wisdom 11:21), so the study of celestial measurement was a way of contemplating God's perfection and power. The more immediate impulse behind the remarkable creative activity on this topic, however, was the Church's need to calculate the date of Easter, the most important feast in the Christian calendar.[4]

The Church generally followed the Roman calendar, which is based on a solar year of 365.25 days and has no particular interest in the lunar month. The observance of Easter, however, was tied to the Jewish lunar calendar rather than the Roman solar one; the Gospels more or less agree that the events of Jesus' passion and resurrection took place during the Jewish feast of Passover, which begins on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan, the

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3 Isidore, *Etymologies*, pp. 10–17.
4 What follows is indebted to Mosshammer, *Easter Computus*.

first full moon of spring. Easter was also observed on a Sunday, though not universally, from at least the second century CE; a widespread custom further stipulated that Easter could not be celebrated on the feast of Passover itself (the so-called 'quartodecimanist' heresy), so if 14 Nisan fell on a Sunday, Easter should be celebrated the following week. Thus Easter – the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox – might occur anywhere from 22 March to 25 April.[5] The Council of Nicaea in 325 stated that Easter was to be celebrated by all Christians on the same Sunday, which was to be calculated by Christian computation rather than the Jewish calendar; it did not, however, fix any rules for determining which Sunday. To determine the date of Easter it was therefore necessary to co-ordinate three calendrical cycles: the solar year, the seven-day week and the lunar month.[6]

Unfortunately none of these cycles is congruent with any other, and various methods were devised to keep the cycles roughly synchronized. Twelve synodic lunar months of twenty-nine or thirty days each is about eleven days short of a solar year (this difference is called the 'epact'); each vernal equinox the Moon is eleven days older than it was the year before. After three years this amounts to more than thirty days, so an extra lunar month must be inserted to bring the lunar and solar years back into rough synchrony.[7] This extra month is called an 'embolism' or 'embolismic month' (also called an 'intercalary month'); a year with an inserted month is an 'embolismic year'. A more familiar adjustment is the practice of observing leap year. Since the solar year was understood to be 365.25 days long, every four years an additional day – the 'bissextile day' – must be inserted to account for the extra quarter of a day. The conventional measurements are not exact (the year is actually roughly 365.2422 days, and the true synodic month 29.53059 days), but by reckoning with these numbers and making occasional adjustments, the lunar, solar and weekly cycles can eventually be made to repeat themselves. The Babylonians had realized that nineteen solar years of 365.25 days were roughly

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5 The vernal equinox was calculated as 25 March in the Roman tradition and in the early Church, but in Alexandria and the Eastern Churches it was calculated as 21 March. By the Anglo-Saxon period the more accurate Alexandrian date had been universally accepted.

6 There are in fact two lunar months. The *sidereal month* is the time the Moon takes to complete one full revolution around the Earth with respect to the background stars, about 27.322 days (rounded up to 28 days in common usage). However, because the Earth is moving along its orbit about the Sun while the Moon is orbiting the earth, the Moon must travel slightly more than 360 degrees to get from one new moon to the next. Thus, the *synodic month*, which is the one in question for Easter calculation, is longer than the sidereal month, roughly 29.531 days; the conventional practice was to alternate months of 29 days with months of 30 days.

7 Lindberg, *Beginnings of Western Science*, p. 89.

equal to 235 lunar months of 29.5 days; if the Moon is full on 1 January of one year, it will again be full on 1 January nineteen years later. A 'decennovenal' or nineteen-year cycle was proposed by the Greek mathematician Meton (fifth century BCE) and taken up by Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, at the end of the fourth century CE. The decennovenal table placed an embolismic month of 30 days in years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17 and 19; by adding one solar day every four years for leap year and subtracting one lunar day (the *saltus lunae*) at the end of each nineteen-year period, a cycle could be produced which was accurate to one-tenth of a day every 19 years.[8] With this cycle one could determine the date of a full moon in any given year. This full moon could fall, however, on any day of the week, and the addition of a leap day every four years meant that the same pattern of weekdays recurs only every 28 years. In 457 Victorius of Aquitaine superimposed the Alexandrian decennovenal cycle on the Roman calendar to create a 532-year (19 × 28 years) 'Paschal Cycle'. His calculations, though riddled with errors, were widely adopted; in 526 Dionysius Exiguus recalculated the Alexandrian tables for the Roman calendar, creating a more exact set of tables than that of Victorius. Despite initial opposition, the Dionysian Paschal table (and with it Dionysius' system of counting years from the Birth of Christ) became standard throughout most of the West.

In a far-flung missionary Church with its more remote outposts cut off from regular contact with Rome and often subject to only nominal episcopal order, the reckoning of Easter took many local forms, most of them eventually sanctioned by long tradition. Some British and Irish Churches, for example, used the 'Insular latercus', a version of a pre-Victorine 84-year cycle (4 × 19 decennovenal cycles + one eight-year cycle with three embolismic months).[9] The Synod of Whitby in 664, recounted by Bede in the *Ecclesiastical History* (III.25–6), was intended to resolve such differences; it ended in victory for the Roman faction, but local variations persisted for some time afterwards. Efforts to impose a single new system inevitably met with resistance, particularly among the British and Irish Churches. The controversy was both a scientific debate and a matter of national politics and ecclesiastical authority. Consensus took on enormous symbolic significance; the reluctance of the Irish to accept the Roman system of Easter-reckoning was portrayed by their opponents as an affront to the unity of the Church and a sign of stubbornness and pride. But whatever else it may have done, the vigour and rancour of the Easter debate fuelled the development of ecclesiastical computus in England. Archbishop

8 McCluskey, *Astronomies and Cultures*, p. 8.
9 McCarthy and Ó Cróinín, 'Easter Table', p. 228. See Walsh and Ó Cróinín (eds.), *Cummian's Letter*, for computus in Ireland generally.

Theodore of Canterbury and Abbot Ceolfrith in Northumbria both contributed to the teaching of computus; the subject engaged the lifelong attention of its most learned proponent, Bede.

Bede championed the mathematical and theological superiority of the Dionysian Paschal tables and the *anno domini* system, and defended these against the errors of the Victorine table and the Insular *latercus* in a number of works, including *De temporibus* (703), *De natura rerum* (*c.* 703–9) – a basic account of natural phenomena largely derived from Isidore of Seville and Pliny's *Natural History* – and finally *De temporum ratione*, written around 725. This last work is far more ambitious and complex than any previous work on computus; it gave computus 'a coherent body of precepts and a technical literature of its own'.[10] *De temporum ratione* is systematic in method and sweeping in scope, beginning with a method of calculating on the fingers and ending with a consideration of the Last Days, moving seamlessly from counting to computus to history to eschatology. It is not notably innovative, although Bede does revise and correct his classical sources on at least one subject, the tides – his own experience of North Sea tides, which are far greater than those in the Mediterranean, presumably gave him the authority to emend his sources.[11] What distinguishes *De temporum ratione* is its lucid and comprehensive structure; Bede provided not only careful explanations of computistical tables but also clear exposition of the principles on which the tables were constructed and the natural science needed to understand them.[12] *De temporum ratione* was widely read (though apparently not in England, where the study of computus seems to have been a casualty of the decline of ecclesiastical rigour in the ninth century), and found its greatest success on the continent in the wake of Charlemagne's requirement in the *Admonitio generalis* of 789 that all clergy should be taught computus in the schools.[13] In the following century scholars such as Hrabanus Maurus, Walafrid Strabo and Helpericus created computus manuscripts for the general clergy by excerpting and redacting Bede's work, combining it with passages from Isidore, Pliny,

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10 Wallis, 'Introduction' to Bede, *Reckoning of Time*, p. xvii. See also her characterization of the work in 'Bede and Science'.

11 Benison, 'Early Medieval Science'; Stevens, 'Bede's Scientific Achievement' in his *Cycles of Time*.

12 Bede includes two 532-year 'Great Cycles', for the years 1 BCE to 531 CE and 532 CE to 1063 CE. Later scholars added a third, extending the series to 1595 CE; see Jones (ed.), *Bedae pseudepigrapha*, pp. 80–1. The Paschal tables in Oxford, St John's 17, optimistically extend for two more Great Cycles, from 1596 CE to 2125 CE to 2651 CE, though the loss of some leaves has left these incomplete.

13 On the manuscripts created to fulfil this requirement, see Cordoliani, 'Traités de comput'; Eastwood, *Revival of Planetary Astronomy*; and Borst, *Schriften zur Komputistik*.

Chalcidius and other authors, and adding calendars, tables, charts and diagrams, with accompanying commentaries.[14] Fleury was the intellectual centre of the French monastic reform, and computus manuscripts produced there are generously illustrated and carefully organized; examples (though not from Fleury itself) include London, British Library, MS Harley 3017 and Vatican, MS BAV Pal. Lat. 485.

Abbo, monk and later abbot of Fleury, visited England *c.* 985 at the invitation of Oswald, bishop of Worcester and archbishop of York, staying at the relatively new foundation of Ramsey.[15] Abbo's computus texts and teaching served as the basis for the computus of his pupil Byrhtferth; this work is preserved in Oxford, St John's College, MS 17 (*c.* 1110, Thorney). Byrhtferth's major English work, the *Enchiridion*, written *c.* 1010–12, is a commentary on this computus. It draws upon Bede's *De natura rerum* and the *De temporibus anni* of Ælfric (discussed below), but its major source appears to be the training Byrhtferth received directly from Abbo. The *Enchiridion* is a manual for monastic oblates and parish priests in Latin and English; English passages generally paraphrase the preceding Latin, 'ut qui Latinitas elogium non potuerint sumere accipant saltim uulgarem nostrum sermonem' [so those who cannot take in the sense of Latin may at least understand our discussion in the vernacular].[16] In addition to instruction in the mathematics and astronomy necessary for understanding the calendar and computus, the *Enchiridion* contains numerous digressions on ancillary topics – the symbolism of numbers, the figures of rhetoric, different kinds of weights and measures, the six ages of the world. In this respect it mirrors the computus manuscripts on which it is based; these often collected what Faith Wallis calls 'a halo of non-computistical materials' having to do with number, dates, measurement, metre, medicine and other matters which could be broadly defined as mathematical.[17]

Byrhtferth's work appears not to have had a wide audience; it survives in only one complete manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 328 (s. xi[med.], possibly from Christ Church Canterbury), though notes on computus related to Byrhtferth's work are found in at least two other manuscripts. Byrhtferth had the misfortune to write as a contemporary of Ælfric and

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14 On ninth-century computus, see Bede, *Opera de temporibus*, pp. 22–256; and Stevens, *Cycles of Time*.
15 On Abbo's life and work, see Van de Vyver, 'Oeuvres inédites d'Abbon de Fleury'; Byrhtferth, *Enchiridion*, pp. xix–xxv; Germann, *De temporum ratione*; and Verbist, 'Abbo of Fleury'. On Abbo's legacy, see Hart, *Learning and Culture*.
16 Byrhtferth, *Enchiridion*, p. 53
17 Wallis, 'Medicine', pp. 107–8.

Wulfstan, two masters of Old English prose, and his work naturally suffers in comparison with theirs. To be fair, few writers in any age could expound on the sort of material covered in the *Enchiridion* with much literary grace. But while Ælfric's style was sharpened by the clarity of his pastoral mission and his strong sense of his audience, and Wulfstan's burns with the fervour of a preacher and the zeal of a reformer in a corrupt age, Byrhtferth's prose remains firmly in the medieval classroom – it is relentlessly pedantic, ostentatious, repetitive, difficult to enjoy.[18] Its opening sentence is typical of its style:

> Incipit computus Latinorum ac Graecorum Hebreorumque et Egiptiorum nec non et Anglorum. – Incipit, id est inchoat, vel initium sumit, sive exordium accepit.

> [Here begins the computus of the Romans and the Greeks and the Hebrews and Egyptians, as well as of the English. *Incipit*: that is, 'starts' or 'takes its inception' or 'receives its send-off'.][19]

Byrhtferth is often constrained by the nature of his materials, but even his rhetorical flourishes seem longwinded and at times a bit halfhearted:

> Nu we ealles ymbe þæs monan ylde spræce habbað and ymbe þære sunnan ryne manega þing geradlice atrahtnod, us þingð wel beheflic þæt we on þisre stowe ymbe þæne *saltus lune* (þæt ys ymbe þæs monan hlyp) wurdliun and hine gehandlion eallswa boclice weras willað habban and healdan, þæt we beon wise and wære þæt we nahwar ne gan of lage, þe læs us gesceamige beforan þæs cynges dugoðe. Vton ærest gleawlice swyðe witan hwæt he sy to soðe and hwanon he come and hwæt he do on þam gerime oððe hwy he sy swa gehaten oððe hwa hine gemette oððe hine þæs wurðscipes cuðe, þæt he sceolde gestandan on þam rimcræfte.

> [Now that we are speaking about the moon's age and have clearly written many things about the sun's course, it seems to us very necessary to speak here about the *saltus lunae* (about the moon's leap), and discuss it just as literate men wish to hold and observe it, so that we can be wise and cautious not to deviate anywhere from the rule, lest we be shamed before the king's retainers. Let us first very wisely know what it truly is and where it comes from and what it does in the computus or why it is called as it is or who discovered it or recognized its worthiness, that it should have a place in the computus.][20]

18 Lapidge, 'Byrhtferth of Ramsey', offers a sharp characterization of Byrhtferth's style. Lutz, *Schoolmasters*, and Derolez, 'Byrhtferðus bene docet', offer more sympathetic appraisals.
19 Byrhtferth, *Enchiridion*, pp. 2–3.
20 *Ibid.*, pp. 64–5.

But whatever its stylistic and intellectual idiosyncrasies, as an example of both scientific erudition and Anglo-Saxon habits of mind Byrhtferth's work is without parallel.

A more elementary account of celestial phenomena is found in Ælfric's *De temporibus anni*, written around 995. This work is neither a computus nor a commentary on a computus, but a primer on the cosmology underlying the study of computus. The work survives in whole or part in eight manuscripts, a number that suggests the work found a welcome audience. It draws primarily on Bede's *De temporum ratione* and Isidore's *De natura rerum* but simplifies or omits their more complex passages and calculations. Ælfric discusses time, the nature of the heavens, the calendar and natural phenomena such as wind, rain, thunder and comets; the topics chosen for explanation and the explanations offered give some insight into the beliefs of those less deeply learned than Byrhtferth. Ælfric's account of Creation is essentially a biblical paraphrase with some additions (on equinoxes, solstices, leap years and so on), almost all of a computistical nature. His explanations are as forgiving as Byrthferth's are rigorous; he writes, for example:

> On ðam oðrum dæge gesceop God heofonan, seo þe is gehaten firmamen-tum, seo is gesewenlic and lichamlic, ac swa ðeah we ne magon for ðære fyrlenan heahnysse, and þæra wolcna þicnysse, and for ure eagena tydder-nysse hi næfre geseon. Seo heofen belicð on hire bosme ealne middaneard, and heo æfre tyrnð onbuton us swyftre ðonne ænig mylenhweowul, ealswa deop under þyssere eorðan swa heo is bufon.
>
> [On the second day God made the heaven which is called *firmamentum*. It is visible and material, although we can never see it because of its great distance, and the thickness of the clouds, and the weakness of our eyes. Heaven enfolds in her bosom all the earth, and constantly turns around us more swiftly than any mill-wheel, as far below the earth as it is above.][21]

Such homely explanations seem aimed at an audience of parish priests and interested laymen, whose training in such subjects might be minimal and whose susceptibility to error might be high, but its clarity is typical of Ælfric's homiletic prose in general. Ælfric's work provides not only the necessary mental models for an understanding of computus but a rational, orthodox and biblically authorized picture of the workings of the cosmos. On some topics he includes warnings against error, including the well-intentioned errors of clerics; to explain the 'bissextile' day in a leap year, for example, he writes:

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21 Ælfric, *De temporibus anni*, 1.4–5. Translations, except where indicated, are my own.

Sume preostas secgað þæt bissextus come ðurh þæt, þæt Iosue abæd æt Gode
þæt seo sunne stod stille anes dæges lencge, ða ða he þa hæðenan of ðan earde
adylegode, þe him God forgeaf. Soð þæt is þæt seo sunne ða stod anes dæges
lencge bufon ðære byrig Gabaon, ðurh þæs ðegenes bene, ac se dæg eode forð
swa swa oðre dagas, and nis næfre þurh þæt bissextus, þeah ðe þa
ungelæredan swa wenon.

[Some priests say that the *bissextus* came about because Joshua prayed to God
that the sun might stand still for the length of a day, when he wiped out the
heathens from the land which God had given him. It is true that the sun stood
still then for the length of a day above the city of Gibeon through that
warrior's prayers, but the day went forth like other days, and the *bissextus* is
never because of that, though the unlearned might think so.][22]

Ælfric's work also suggests his concern over the perils of unbridled scientific
speculation; his discussion of the *saltus lunae* includes a suddenly heated
condemnation of the practice of lunar prognostication: 'Ne sceal nan cristen-
man nan ðing be ðam monan wiglian. Gif he hit deð, his geleafa ne bið naht'
[No Christian man should divine anything by the moon; if he does so, his faith
is nothing].[23]

Computus was generally transmitted, however, not through single-author
tracts like those of Byrhtferth and Ælfric but through anonymous collections
of short texts in prose and verse, usually with accompanying diagrams and
tables.[24] Several dozen manuscripts containing computus material survive
from Anglo-Saxon England; no two are identical. It is difficult to generalize
about material whose defining characteristic is its diversity, but broadly speak-
ing, the central texts of a computus are a calendar and Easter tables. The
calendar could contain an enormous amount of information: the names of
months in several languages, the numbering of days in the Roman system, the
occasion of saint's days and other fixed feast days;[25] a system of 'concurrent'
numbers from 1 to 7 allowed one to determine the day of the week in any
given year (if the first Sunday of the year falls on a '1' day, for example, then all
subsequent days in the calendar with '1' will also be Sundays). In principle the
calendar and its accompanying tables supplied all the information needed to
find the date of Easter in any given year. But the methods used to determine

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22 *Ibid.*, 7.1–6. The erroneous link between the *bissextus* and Joshua's prayer is found, e.g.,
   in N. Orchard (ed.), *Leofric Missal*, vol. II, p. 55.
23 Ælfric, *De temporibus anni*, 8.7.
24 For the development of computus, see Bede, *Opera de temporibus*, pp. 75–113; Cordoliani,
   'Contributions à la littérature du comput'; Borst, *Computus*; and Baker and Lapidge,
   'Introduction' to Byrhtferth, *Enchiridion*, pp. xl–lx.
25 For Anglo-Saxon calendars, see Wormald (ed.), *English Kalendars*.

this date were far from self-explanatory, and most computus collections include texts in prose or verse giving directions for the use of the tables, definitions of terms and instructions for making the necessary calculations. Because they were composed of a variable number of short separate items, generally anonymous or unattributed, computus manuscripts tended to collect a congeries of other short texts on time, space or measurement, only vaguely or analogically related to the calculation of Easter. These manuscripts 'assumed the role of a sort of filing cabinet for the scattered fragments of ancient scientific erudition'.[26]

Most of these short texts are in Latin, but a number of manuscripts contain English texts as well.[27] These are found most plentifully in eleventh-century manuscripts of a computus apparently assembled in Winchester in the last quarter of the tenth century. Examples of this 'Winchester computus' include, from Winchester in the first half of the eleventh century, London, British Library, MS Cotton Titus D. xxvi/xxvii (the 'Ælfwine Prayerbook');[28] Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R. 15.32 (written in the same hand); London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius E. xviii and London, British Library, MS Arundel 60 (psalters with prefatory computus material); Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 422 (containing masses and offices with a prefatory computus, possibly from Sherborne but copied from Winchester materials), as well as the unlocalized London, British Library, MS Harley 3271 (s. xi^1) and London, British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A. xv + BL Egerton 3314 (Christ Church Canterbury, end of s. xi). A Worcester version of this computus is found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 9 (s. x$^{3/4}$) and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Hatton 113 (s. xi^2). English items include notes on epacts, concurrents or moveable feasts, rules for fasting, prognostics and brief notes on biblical lore (the size of the ark, the age of the Virgin Mary, etc.). Few versions of texts are identical, suggesting a number of separate and ad hoc acts of translation rather than a single textual tradition; since most texts are little more than instructions or bits of information, their transmission was perhaps both written and oral, a combination of authoritative text and everyday practice with a close interdependence between Latin and English texts.

The range and variety of texts found in computus manuscripts suggest that computus was not so much a single discourse as a master-trope for the idea of *cosmos*, orderly space and time. An example of this function is found in

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26 Wallis, 'Medicine', p. 21.

27 Most are discussed in Hollis and Wright, *Secular Learning*, pp. 185–95; many are edited in Henel, *Studien zum altenglischen Computus*.

28 Günzel (ed.), *Ælfwine's Prayerbook*.

London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius B. v (*c.* 1050, Christ Church Canterbury), a lavishly illustrated collection of scientific material, maps, genealogies, historical and geographical notes, *The Wonders of the East* and other items, which may have been made for a wealthy lay patron. This manuscript has been described as a 'miscellany', but in fact its organizing principle seems to be computus – the reckoning of space and time.[29] So central was computus to early medieval thinking about the nature of the world that it served as a paradigm for other branches of knowledge, shaping not only the discourses of other fields – geography, measurement, chronology, health and hygiene – but the *habitus* of daily life as well. One such *habitus* is the awareness of and relationship to time.[30] Telling time by observation of the Sun and Moon or the seasonal appearance of plants and animals is a universal human activity, but the study of computus required an unprecedented attention to the precise relationships between days, months and years, and the ability not only to observe time unfolding through events but to calculate times in the future. In the monastic community, the day was organized around communal observation of regular periods of prayer, work, study and rest; this schedule required an unusually precise sense of time, and thus new models for thinking about time.

It did not, to be sure, produce new tools for time measurement. The monastic hours appear to have been kept by observation of the Sun by day and the stars by night; surviving Anglo-Saxon sundials are all but useless for actually measuring time, and other devices seem to have been rare. Fleury, an extraordinarily prosperous and well-organized monastery, had a water-clock, but this was regulated by observing the stars;[31] near the end of his *Life of Alfred*, Asser describes the king's candle-clock in such detail and with such wonder that it must have been an impressive novelty, not a familiar object. Nor did this concern for the passage of time require a theory of the structure and motion of the stars and planets. As Steven McCluskey points out, 'Practical astronomy is an art, not unlike the art of the potter, the smith, or the healer. As such, it can exist independently of any formal articulation of a mathematical astronomy or a philosophical cosmology.'[32] It did, however, require greater attention to the celestial markers of time, greater facility in describing time and motion, and a higher degree of accuracy in the making and copying of

29 Hollis, 'Scientific and Medical Writings', p. 194. The manuscript is available in facsimile in McGurk (ed.), *Illustrated Miscellany*.
30 See McCluskey, *Astronomies and Cultures*.
31 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
32 McCluskey, 'Gregory of Tours', p. 4.

tables and diagrams to represent time. All are prerequisites for the more accurate observation of nature and the invention of new paradigms to explain these observations.

Computus encouraged an apprehension of time as a quantifiable thing, an objective phenomenon subject to observation and measurement. The fact that 'the fleeting and waved-tossed course of time'[33] could be predicted and captured in formulas and tables is itself an idea of enormous consequence. The ability to calculate future dates, or even the power to consult a chart that contains this information, makes possible an entirely new perspective on the nature of time: time could be imagined not just through the narrative and memory of famous persons and great events, but through image and number alone. Bede himself was aware of the implications of his work not only for imagining the future but for remembering the past; in the introduction to his Paschal tables he writes 'whoever reads them can, with unerring gaze, not only look forward to the present and future, but can also look back at each and every date of Easter in the past; and in order to clarify an ancient text, he can clearly identify all the years, since it sometimes is doubtful when and of what sort they were'.[34] The Paschal table is a kind of time machine that allows one to survey past and future, a powerfully concrete way to imagine time stretching forwards and backwards in an orderly numbered progression of years that could be counted, predicted and gradually – as is evident in many computus manuscripts – filled with annals, records and other memorabilia.

What is important about this model of time, even beyond its regularity, is that the memorabilia could be added later: the framework comes first.[35] The computus encouraged a sense that time could be counted by equal years, even though it might be remembered by extraordinary events. Time could be imagined as a matrix existing separately from the events which occur in time, just as 'space' is said to exist apart from the objects that fill it. The Paschal table presented a model of time freed from the limits of individual experience or local perspective, standing apart from and above events in order to bring them under a single temporal regime. It provides something like a visual prologue to the later notion of objective or absolute temporality, an image of long spans of time stretching in regular sequence, page after page, from the past into the future. The modern scientific concept of time as an objective, uniform, quantifiable thing has its most distant echo not in the mechanical clock or the factory whistle, but in the tolling of a bell calling monks to prayer.

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33 Bede, *De temporum ratione*, chap. 71 (trans. *Reckoning of Time*, p. 249).
34 *Ibid.*, chap. 65 (trans. *Reckoning of Time*, p. 156).
35 Liuzza, 'Anglo-Saxon Sense of Time'.

The shape of thought

Another consequence of the centrality of computus in the early Middle Ages was the impetus it provided for the representation of information and ideas in visual form. Whereas Bede's *De natura rerum* was written without any accompanying diagrams – at least he does not refer to any in the text – when the work was excerpted for later computus collections it was often furnished with diagrams and other visual aids. The development of visual depictions of abstract ideas is an important moment in the history of science: just as the new arts of the Renaissance supported and gave vigour to the new sciences of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the visual representation of nature and knowledge in the Middle Ages shaped what could be thought and known.[36] 'Cosmology lent itself to images', Bruce Eastwood observes, 'because the doctrines of medieval cosmology emphasized hierarchy, simple numerical relationships, and repetitive reflects of patterns.'[37] By far the most common shape for computus diagrams was the circle, whether the information contained in the diagram required it or not – that is, whether the circular diagram represented the planetary spheres or the parts of the Bible. Isidore of Seville's *De natura rerum* was so often accompanied by circular diagrams that it was sometimes called the *Liber rotarum*.[38] The circle, representing wholeness, completion and the perfection of nature, came to be used for the representation of almost any kind of schematic information. Its symmetry and simple oppositions and correspondences made it memorable, visually appealing and relatively easy to grasp and reproduce. The purpose of most such diagrams is not so much to explain a calculation, still less to represent the physical world, but to construct a model of the universe in the viewer's mind. The most common representation of the world, for example, the so-called 'T-O' map, is a symbolic glyph rather than a geographical representation; it conveys very little practical information about the physical world. Circular representations of the winds, months, Evangelists or zones of the earth are abstractions from physical reality rather than depictions of it; they are based not on observation but on theoretical postulates.

One common circular diagram, found in a number of computus manuscripts of the ninth century and later, expresses the homology between the four humours, elements and seasons by depicting interlocking circles of

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36 M. Evans, 'Geometry of the Mind'.
37 Eastwood, 'Medieval Science Illustrated', p. 187.
38 Bober, 'Illustrated Medieval School-Book'. On the illustrations in scientific manuscripts of the earlier Middle Ages, see J. E. Murdoch, *Album of Science*.

mundus-annus-homo (Figure 19.1).[39] The diagram expresses a doctrine found in Isidore and in Bede's *De temporum ratione*, chapter 35:
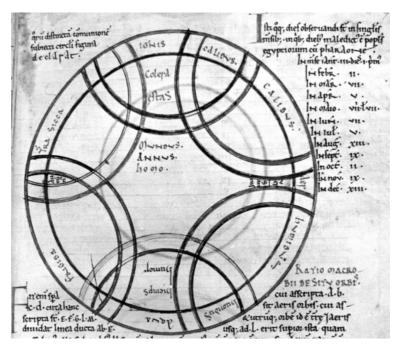
> There are four seasons in the year ... [which] take their name from this temperateness; or else they are rightly called *tempora* because they turn one into the other, being tempered one to another by some qualitative likeness. For winter is cold and wet, inasmuch as the Sun is quite far off; spring, when [the Sun] comes back above the Earth, is wet and warm; summer, when it waxes very hot, is warm and dry; autumn, when it falls to the lower regions, dry and cold ... It is also said that the very elements of the universe are distinguished by these divergent qualities, and that they are knit into a company with each other, but each to each. For earth is dry and cold, water cold and wet, air wet and warm, fire warm and dry, and therefore the first is likened to autumn, the next to winter, the next to spring, and the last to summer. And man himself, who is called 'microcosm' by the wise, that is 'a smaller universe', has his body tempered in every respect by these same qualities; indeed each of its constituent humours imitates the manner of the season in which it prevails. For blood, which increases in the spring, is moist and warm; red bile, which [increases in] the summer, is hot and dry; black bile, which [increases in] the autumn, is dry and cold; and phlegmatic humours, which [increase in] the winter, are cold and moist.[40]

This diagram, a kind of scientific mandala for the contemplation of *cosmos*, traces the visible form of the theories that made computus manuscripts such capacious containers of miscellaneous information. Time, the heavens and the body were not merely analogous; they were essentially made of the same stuff. If certain humours predominated during certain seasons, for example, then it was only prudent to add questions of health to discussions of the calendar;[41] if the humours moved in sympathy with celestial bodies, it was reasonable to connect the phases of the moon to the movements of one's life. Most Anglo-Saxon calendars contain indications of two *dies males* in each month and the *dies caniculares* of late summer, and numerous texts warn against 'Egyptian Days' in which bloodletting was dangerous. Many computus manuscripts contain prognostic texts devoted to health and fortune but grounded in the sense of time: good and bad days for bloodletting, the fate of a

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39 On this diagram, see E. Wickersheimer, 'Figures médico-astrologiques des IXe, Xe, et XIe siècles'; and Vössen, 'Über die Elementen-Syzygien'. Byrhtferth appears, unsurprisingly, to have developed a more complex version linking the signs of the zodiac, the winds, ages of man, seasons of the year, elements and cardinal directions (fol 7ᵛ); see Semper, 'Doctrine and Diagrams'.

40 Bede, *Reckoning of Time*, p. 100.

41 A thorough study of dietary calendars is found in Donati, 'Fra teorie mediche'.

19.1 Diagram 'mundus-annus-homo', with the four elements, the four seasons and the four temperaments (London, British Library, MS Royal C. I, fol. 7^r).

patient who falls ill on a given day of the lunar month, lists of good and bad actions to be undertaken on each day of the month, the character of a child born on a certain day, the character of the coming year depending on the day of the week on which 1 January falls, the meaning of thunder at different hours of the day.[42]

Ælfric preached against the use of such prognostics on more than one occasion; the number and variety of surviving manuscripts containing prognostics suggest that his concerns were by no means unwarranted, and the learned Latin nature of many prognostics indicates that it was not just laypeople who were using them. Presumably such texts were not regarded as superstition or heterodoxy by the priests and monks who consulted them. Astrological prediction and the casting of horoscopes had long been con-

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42 See Liuzza, 'Anglo-Saxon Prognostics in Context', and *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*; most texts are edited by Chardonnens in *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics, 900–1100*.

demned by the Church, but prognostics, which merely charted the changing conditions of celestial influence on human activity, might be regarded as a branch of natural philosophy rather than a form of divination. Humoral theory, which insists on the relationship between health and time, provided a warrant for the belief that some days or times would be particularly efficacious, and others especially dangerous. But even apart from any theoretical justification, an inexplicable and quite possibly random list of good and bad days might appear reasonable to a monastic culture accustomed to the continuous submission to a *regula*, the close observation of time, whether the hours of the Divine Office or the monthly calendar of commemorations and solemnities, and the consultation of equally complex (and to the uninitiated, equally arbitrary-looking) tables of the computus. Like computus, prognostics explicate the patterns hidden under the apparent randomness of the passage of time; like computus, they generally take the form of calendars or lists of days. Prognostics bring a sense of order and rationality to the chaotic uncertainty of life; they offer a *regula* for Fortuna herself, a method of understanding, foreseeing and accepting the operation of time and chance.[43]

The care of the body

Prognostics are a kind of conceptual bridge between computus and medicine; they are found both in computus manuscripts and in manuscripts containing Latin medical texts, such as Cambridge, University Library, MS Gg.5.35 (s. xi[med.], St Augustine's Canterbury) and London, British Library, MS Sloane 475 (s. xi[ex] or xi/xii, of uncertain provenance). As with computus, the manuscript evidence for early medieval medicine is complex, and much of it remains barely or badly analysed; there is little indication of a standard canon of medical texts that might make up the core of any regular or continuous institutionalized medical training.[44] Learned medicine derived mainly from the corpus of texts traditionally ascribed to Hippocrates and Galen, in its origins a rational, secular medicine which sought to explain the causes of health and disease by a theory of the material cosmos rather than an appeal to magical or supernatural agents.[45] The

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43 Some reflections on the larger meaning of computus in the context of the monastic life are found in Wallis, 'Images of Order'.
44 On the general complexity and lack of coherence in early medieval medical texts, see Glaze, 'Perforated Wall'.
45 See Temkin, *Galenism*.

assumptions that underlay such works, however – that disease arises from natural causes and is subject to natural cures; that it reflects a uniform, not capricious, Nature; that it is a state of imbalance and is cured by restoration of that balance; that bodily balance is related to the humours and seasons and is best maintained by a regimen of diet and exercise; that Nature is the true healer whom the physician merely assists through advice, and observes and understands through diagnosis and prognosis – are only occasionally stated in the texts themselves, often alluded to and rarely expounded, but implicit in their lists of plant remedies, dietary advice and practices such as bloodletting.

Medicine was one area in which native and vernacular practices could stand alongside learned classical recipes and methods of treatment, as both worked from a similar repertoire of herbal remedies and analogous (and usually tacit) assumptions about the power of plant and animal products. The surviving manuscript evidence, however, suggests a fairly strong distinction between a learned tradition based on Hippocratic-Galenic medicine and the classical pharmacopoeia on the one hand and popular practice on the other. Vernacular medical collections are generally far more concerned with recipes and cures than with general health regimens and calendrical predictions.[46] A collection of recipes known as the *Herbarium of Pseudo-Apuleius*, actually a group of treatises generally thought to have originated in the fourth century,[47] survives in several related English versions:[48] London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius C. iii (s. xi[I] or xi[med.], Christ Church Canterbury or Rochester), Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Hatton 76 (s. xi[med.], Worcester), London, British Library, MS Harley 585 (s. x/xi or xi[I], S. England?), London, British Library, MS Harley 6258B, fols. 1–51 (s. xii[2], S. England). A unique manuscript compilation known as Bald's *Leechbook* (from a colophon at the end of the second book beginning 'Bald habet hunc librum Cild quem conscribere iussit' [Bald owns this book which he ordered Cild to copy]) survives in London, British

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46 Among many useful studies, see Talbot, *Medicine in Medieval England*; Rubin, *Medieval English Medicine*; Deegan and Scragg (eds.), *Medicine in Early Medieval England*; M. L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*; Getz, *Medicine in the English Middle Ages*; and van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies*.

47 Howald and Sigerist (eds.), *Antonii Musae De herba vettonica liber*. Latin manuscripts of the *Herbarium* and related texts include Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 1431 (s. xi/xii, St Augustine's Canterbury) and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 130 (s. xi/xii, Bury St Edmunds).

48 De Vriend (ed.), *Old English Herbarium*.

Library, MS Royal 12.D. xvii (s. x[med.], Winchester?).[49] It consists of two sections, the first devoted to external diseases and the second to internal ones, carefully organized in head-to-toe order. A third section of the manuscript (fols. 109[r]–27[v]), known as *Leechbook III* and generally recognized as a separate work, is less carefully organized and its recipes are not apparently based on classical sources – they rely almost entirely on northern European ingredients and only about a third of them can be found in Latin sources. A third collection, known as the *Lacnunga*, is found in London, British Library, MS Harley 585, fols. 130–93 (s. x/xi or xi[r], S. England?);[50] it is far less carefully copied, shows little sign of organization at all, and includes charms and remedies for diseases caused by witches and elves. It is characterized by M. L. Cameron as 'a sort of commonplace book with no other apparent aim than to record whatever items of medical interest came to the scribe's attention'.[51] Medical recipes also survive in the margins of several manuscripts, but like most such marginal additions, these are difficult to characterize as a group.[52]

Scholars have commented on the 'striking absence of theoretical material'[53] in early medical manuscripts. Medical manuscripts are seldom as broadly inclusive as computus manuscripts, but they are nearly all compendia and florilegia, collections of anonymous, pseudonymous or misattributed excerpts and treatises, recipes and treatments; even when carefully divided into chapters and

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49 Deegan (ed.), 'Critical Edition of MS BL Royal 12.D. xvii'; a facsimile is found in Wright (ed.), *Bald's Leechbook*. See also Meaney, 'Variant Versions'; and M. L. Cameron, 'Bald's *Leechbook*: Its Sources', and 'Bald's *Leechbook* and Cultural Interactions'. The evidence for collections related to Bald's *Leechbook* is fragmentary and indirect: London, BL MS Cotton Otho B. xi (s. x[med.]), was almost completely destroyed but survives in Laurence Nowell's 1562 transcript as London, BL MS Add. 43703, fols. 261–4[v]; London, BL MS Harley 55, fols. 1–3 (s. xi[2]), contains recipes corresponding to material missing from Bald's *Leechbook* and closely related to that manuscript; London, BL MS Cotton Galba A.xiv (s. xi[2/4]) contains two recipes on fol. 72[r] similar to those in the second part of the *Leechbook*. Less closely related, but evidence of a similar tendency to translate late classical medical texts into organized vernacular collections like that of the *Leechbook*, is Louvain-la-Neuve, Université Catholique de Louvain, Centre Général de Documentation, Fragmenta H. Omont 3, a single leaf containing eleven recipes for diseases of the leg and foot, edited in Schauman and Cameron, 'Newly-Found Leaf'.

50 Edited in Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine*; and Pettit (ed), *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*.

51 A. L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, p. 35.

52 Among these are Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 41, pp. 208, 326 (s. xi[med.], with additions made in Exeter); London, Wellcome Historical Medical Library, MS 46 (s. x/xi); London, BL MS Cotton Domitian i (s. x[med.], St Augustine's Canterbury); London, BL MS Cotton Vitellius C. iii, a manuscript of the *Herbarium* which has English and Latin recipes added in later hands on fols. 18[r], 82[v]–3[r]. Medical recipes are also found in the computus sections of London, BL MS Cotton Titus D. xxvi/xxvii, Oxford, St John's College, MS 17, and London, BL MS Cotton Vitellius E. xviii.

53 French, *Medicine Before Science*, p. 64.

provided with lists of contents, they are not organized according to or informed by a theory of health and disease. Medicine is generally presented as a skill, not a science. The distinguishing feature of the texts emerging from the south Italian Salernitan 'school' of the eleventh and twelfth centuries[54] is generally taken to be the reintroduction of a Galenic theoretical framework and professional foundation for medical practice. It is now clear, however, that the sources for some of the texts regarded as typically 'Salernitan' – the *Practica* attributed to Petrocellus and the *Passionarius Galeni* attributed to Gariopontus – were available in England centuries earlier than is usually thought;[55] it might be more accurate to say not that Anglo-Saxon medicine lacked philosophical or theoretical ideas about health, but that surviving collections of medical texts are not structured around these ideas. In a number of places Bald's *Leechbook* assumes that the cause of disease is humoral imbalance;[56] it includes a discussion of the *dies caniculares* and other good and bad days for bloodletting, and recommends bloodletting as a remedy for some illnesses. In contrast, however, only one remedy in the *Lacnunga* recommends bloodletting. If this work reflects native practice more strongly than classical tradition, as most scholars assume, then it may be said that humoral theory and the practices derived from it – dietary regulation, calendrical prognosis and bloodletting – were learned ideas imported from the classical medical tradition, 'specialized medical information rather than common knowledge'.[57]

The disarticulation of Galenic medicine into a host of local craft practices may have been, in part, a deliberate reaction to its underlying theoretical framework.[58] The rational and materialist assumptions of Galenic theory fit uneasily with the Christian belief that disease often has divine causes and responds to miraculous cures. But an equally strong factor militating against the imposition of a single theoretical framework on medical practice was surely the range of practices available, and the variety of ways to address the problem of illness. These included learned physicians consulting classical medical treatises in Latin or in English, local healers familiar with native plants and oral tradition, trauma specialists experienced in the treatment of wounds, broken bones and so on, midwives and herbalists, and divine

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54 Kristeller, 'School of Salerno'; Baader, 'Schule von Salerno'; Jordan, 'Construction of a Philosophical Medicine'; and the essays in Jacquart and Bagliani (eds.), *Scuola medica Salernitana*.
55 Talbot, 'Some Notes'; A. L. Cameron, 'Sources of Medical Knowledge'; Glaze, 'Perforated Wall'.
56 Ayoub, 'Old English *wæta*'.
57 *Ibid.*, p. 344.
58 Keil, 'Möglichkeiten'; Nutton, 'God, Galen'; Amundsen, *Medicine, Society and Faith*.

intercessors in the saints and their relics and shrines. In their coexistence these various systems of practice must have influenced one another, and presumably tended to work against the presentation of medicine as a unified body of knowledge informed by a single theory or principle.

Even as a purely practical art, however, medicine was necessarily a specialized skill, and while secular healers certainly continued their craft, the centre of training and transmission for the kinds of works preserved in the *Herbarium* and Bald's *Leechbook* was the ecclesiastical and monastic establishment.[59] Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (v.2–6), notes the medical expertise of John of Beverley, who is said to have learned the art from Archbishop Theodore. The remarkable intelligence and organization evident in Bald's *Leechbook*, a finely organized compendium of information on herbal remedies and surgical procedures taken from a variety of sources, suggest that there was an active vernacular medical culture by the end of the tenth century, one which incorporated both native elements and translations of classical texts; it hints at an established tradition of professional practitioners, whether lay or clerical, some of whom (Bald, Oxa, Dun) are mentioned by name. Clerical participation is assumed in a number of its recipes, which instruct the physician to say masses, use consecrated hosts, or recite Latin prayers. These remedies suggest how inseparable are the 'rational' and 'ritual' elements of the healing arts even at the most learned levels. Nor is there any clear distinction between medical practices and what a modern reader would call 'charms' or 'spells'. An example from Bald's *Leechbook I* provides a remedy for 'lentenadl'[60] composed of two parts; the first is a concoction containing 'wermod, eoforþrote, elehtre, wegbræde, ribbe, cerfille, attorlaðe, feferfuge, alexandre, bisceopwyrt, lufestice, saluie, cassuc' (wormwood, carline thistle, lupin, plantain, ribwort, chervil, betony, feverfew, alexanders, marsh-mallow, lovage, sage, sedge) with ale, holy water and 'springwyrt' (wild caper). The second is an incantatory prayer in English and Latin:

> Þis mon sceal writan on husldisce and on þone drenc mid halig wætere þwean and singan on. + + + A + + + + + C D + + + + + + + + + *In principio erat uerbum et uerbum erat aput deum et deus erat uerbum Hoc erat In principio aput deum Omnia per ipsum facta Sunt*. þweah þonne þæt gewrit mid halig wætre of þam disce on þone drenc. sing þonne credo and *pater noster* and þis leoþ. *Beati Inmaculati* þone sealm, mid *ad dominum* þam XII gebedsealmum. *Adiuro uos frigores et febres* . . . [there follows a lengthy prayer] and þriwa þonne onsupe þæs wæteres swelces gehwæþer þara manna.

59 Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*; but see also van Arsdall, 'Medical Training'.
60 Tertian malaria, according to A. L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, p. 10.

[One should write this on the paten and wash it off into the drink with holy water, and sing over it: 'In the beginning was the Word' . . . Then wash that writing off the dish with holy water into the drink. Then sing the *Credo* and *Pater noster* and this song, *Beati immaculati* the psalm, with the twelve prayer psalms. 'I adjure you, chills and fevers' . . . And let each of the men (i.e., the patient and the doctor) then sip three times from the water.][61]

Such remedies suggest how difficult it is to define the boundary between medical knowledge (whether of herbal remedies or of the proper times for treatment) and religious ritual or invocations of divine power.[62]

Monasteries and churches were common gathering-places for the sick and infirm looking for cures from the shrines of the saints, and while it seems only natural that medical advice might have been dispensed along with prayer and charity, the primary motive of the patient as well as the practitioner would have been saintly intercession, not learned treatment. Ælfric's life of St Swithun recounts, in his characteristic rhythmical prose, how

Þær wurdon gehælede þurh ðone halgan wer feower wanhale menn binnan ðrym dagum, and geond fif monþas feawa daga wæron þæt ðær næron gehælede huru ðry untrume, hwilon fif oððe syx, seofon oððe eahta, tyn oððe twelf, syxtyne oððe eahtatyne. Binnon tyn dagum þær wurdon twa hund manna gehælede, and swa fela binnan twelf monðum þæt man hi getellan ne mihte. Se lictun læg afylled mid alefedum mannum, swa þæt man eaðe ne mihte þæt mynster gesecan; and þa ealle wurdon swa wundorlice gehælede binnan feawa dagum, þæt man þær findan ne mihte fif unhale menn of þam micclan heape.

[Four sick men were healed by that holy man within three days, and for five months there were few days when there were not healed three patients, sometimes five or six, seven or eight, ten or twelve, sixteen or eighteen. In ten days two hundred men were healed, and so many in twelve months that one cannot count them. The churchyard was thronged with crippled people, so that one could not easily reach the minster, and all these were so wonderfully healed within a few days that one could not find five sick men from that great mob.][63]

Later (lines 431–4) he reports that

Seo ealde cyrce wæs eall behangen mid criccum, and mid creopera sceamelum, fram ende oð oþerne on ægðrum wage, þe ðær wurdon gehælede, and man ne mihte swa ðeah macian hi healfe up.

61 Cockayne (ed. and trans.), *Leechdoms*, vol. II, pp. 134–6.
62 See Jolly, 'Anglo-Saxon Charms'.
63 Ælfric, *Lives of Saints*, no. XXI, lines 143–55 (vol. I, p. 450).

[The old church was all festooned with the crutches and cripples' stools of those who had been healed there, from one end to the other on both walls, and even so they could not put half of them up.]

These scenes of a churchyard thronged with the sick and suffering, and of a church cluttered with souvenirs of healings, are offered as testimony to the power of the saint, not the learning of the physician; as they blur the distinction between a church and a hospital, they remind us that in the Middle Ages medicine was not a discrete science but part of a larger vision of humanity in the universe. Bodily health was inseparable from spiritual health; illness might be a divine affliction, and healing an act of mercy or a dramatic sign of divine power. A patient seeking treatment had many options: the power of prayer, appeals to *Christus medicus*, visits to the shrine or relic of a saint, dietary regulation, bloodletting, herbal remedies, medicinal washes and surgery. And before offering treatment, a physician might well have to determine whether the disease was divine punishment, demonic possession or physical ailment. Studies of Anglo-Saxon medicine which examine its practices solely in terms of their native or classical origins, or by isolating practices which modern science regards as potentially effective from those it does not, yield a potentially distorted picture of the nature of medieval medicine.[64] Such divisions offer no method by which we might view medieval medical thought synchronically and structurally, to consider how and why one kind of practice or another might be applied to a given illness, and to understand the social and historical forces which converged on the body of the patient.

This need for a broader and more nuanced view of medical practice extends to other areas of Anglo-Saxon intellectual life. Generally speaking, most histories of science are vigorously teleological, tracing a path from the Greeks to the modern age which focuses on examples of theoretical and experimental inquiry – that is, on the foreshadowing of modern science. In so doing they have little time for those cultures whose relationship to the natural world was less inquisitorial, or more semiotic or textually based. Some histories will, at best, admit that scholars like Isidore and Bede carried the flickering torch of reason and 'provided continuity through a dangerous and difficult period'.[65] While such narratives of origin have their value, this approach makes it more difficult to perceive the ways of knowing and

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64 These sentences echo thoughts first expressed in Liuzza, 'Sphere of Life and Death', p. 28. See also Horden, 'What's Wrong with Early Medieval Medicine?'
65 Lindberg, *Beginnings of Western Science*, p. 159.

understanding which underlay Anglo-Saxon efforts to describe, measure or control the natural world, the activities and ideas which occupied the space that is today filled by 'science'. Though not possessed of an investigative method, and less empirically minded than modern scientists, the Anglo-Saxons did contemplate the nature of the world; they observed natural phenomena and tried to fit their observations into models of how the universe worked. Their knowledge of the world, the cosmos, time and the body were organized into different categories from our own, conducted under different auspices and by groups with different interests from ours, and grounded in different methods and on different standards of proof, but to dismiss the age as 'pre-scientific' only disguises the fact that the practices of 'science' itself are shaped as much by changing cultural norms as by the ineluctable realities of physical laws.

It is said that the magic of one age becomes the science of the next; travel through air and space, communication across the continents, enhanced strength and prolonged life were once the stuff of fairy tales, the province of saints and madmen. The reverse is equally true – the theory of the humours, the idea of astral and planetary influence, the efficacy of ritual, the symbolic properties of the natural world, were once central to the learned understanding of the cosmos but now belong, at best, to 'alternative' thinkers on the fringes of reason. But one cannot hold the past responsible for the uses that the future makes of it; even a poor theory is still a theory, and an inadequate model is no less a model for that. If it is true, as Plato claimed, that 'wisdom begins in wonder' (Διά τὸ θαυμάζειν ἡ σοφία),[66] then the 'scientific' spirit has surely lived in every age. The Anglo-Saxon poets, certainly, were fond of celebrating the world's wonder as a path to wisdom. The heavens bright with stars, the wise eyes of a newborn child, a plant bearing fruit in its season, the birds and beasts whose uncanny ways are so like yet unlike our own, the vastness of the sea and the mysteries of the body – these have always had the ability to inspire wonder and awe. The response to this wonder has differed from one age to another, and the roads by which wonder leads to wisdom have wound through many different landscapes, but the scrutiny of science, the construction of ever more elaborate explanatory paradigms, and the demystifying efforts of centuries of research have not diminished its capacity to stir the heart and to fill the mind with a longing to understand.

66 Plato, *Theaetetus*, 155d.

Chapter 20

Legal documentation and the practice of English law

LISI OLIVER

The historical study of early English documents which could be subsumed under the rubric of 'legal texts' has seen an impressive resurgence in the past half-century, with the publication of Patrick Wormald's *The Making of English Law* and editions of cartularies belonging to individual religious establishments.[1] This chapter, by contrast, concentrates on the development of written and literary styles in legal documentation, examining how legal writing influenced and was influenced by other written texts. It also addresses the continued use of orality in legal transactions. The transition from oral to written transmission of laws and legal documents involved the development of legal formulations both drawing on oral tradition and also influenced by emergent literary styles. The following analyses present varieties of legal documentation – laws, charters (or diplomas), writs and wills – in chronological appearance, and consider how the cross-pollination between these genres and other forms of written culture both within and outside the Anglo-Saxon territories enhances our understanding of the uses of documentation in Anglo-Saxon England. Not only does the study of literature inform our interpretation of law, but legal formulations also leave traces on other facets of literary culture. The chapter ends with discussion of two cases showing law in practice, demonstrating the application of various forms of oral and written evidence.

Laws

From their first attestation, Anglo-Saxon laws were written in the Old English vernacular, distinguishing them from contemporary Latin counterparts on the

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1 Wormald, *Making of English Law*; see also his *Legal Culture*. The ongoing series of charter editions, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, is produced by the British Academy. An excellent overview of late legal documentation is provided by Keynes, 'Royal Government'.

European continent.[2] This model was established by Æthelberht of Kent, whose laws were promulgated around 600 CE; his code is our earliest documented text in Old English, although it is preserved only in the twelfth-century *Textus Roffensis* (where scribal transmission across centuries modernized many linguistic features).[3] The authenticity of the original code is attested by the statement in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (II.5) that Æthelberht set laws 'iuxta exempla Romanorum' [according to the examples of the Romans]. Most scholars agree that this meant setting laws in writing, as opposed to the previous practice of oral transmission.[4] Two possible motivations can be hypothesized for Æthelberht's commission of his laws in the vernacular: first, to reproduce as nearly as possible the orally transmitted version of legal stipulations in a language accessible to his people; and second, to separate himself and his people linguistically and thus politically from the dominance of Francia (where laws were composed in Latin). The impetus for this recording was probably Æthelberht's conversion to Christianity, following the arrival in 597 of the Augustinian mission sent from Rome by Pope Gregory I, bringing with them literacy in the form of the Roman alphabet. The 'domas' [judgments] attributed to Æthelberht thus contain both earlier secular laws and later laws pertaining to his new religion.

Æthelberht's laws – schematically presented in the following chart – are the most logically coherent collection produced in Anglo-Saxon England:

§§1–7	Offences against Church and public assembly.
§§8–17	Offences against king and his household.
§§18–19	Offences against *eorlas* [noblemen].
§§20–32	Offences against *ceorlas* [freemen].
§§33–71	Personal injury laws.
§§72–7	Offences against (and rights of) women.
§§78–81	Offences against *esnas* (a rank with a legal status intermediate between freeman and slave).
§§81–3	Offences against *þeowas* [slaves].

2 For the laws of Kent, see Oliver (ed.), *Beginnings of English Law*. For later laws, see Wormald, *Making of English Law*, esp. chaps. 5 and 6. The classic edition of Anglo-Saxon laws is Liebermann (ed.), *Gesetze der Angelsächsen*. The Early English Laws Project (www.earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk) is in the process of updating these editions. For translations, see Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *English Historical Documents*.

3 For dating, see Oliver (ed.), *Beginnings of English Law*, pp. 25–51.

4 Wormald, '*Exempla Romanorum*'.

This top-to-bottom scheme based on social hierarchy may represent the written outcome of a preliterate ordering, inherited from continental Germanic practice and originally devised for mnemonic preservation of laws not heretofore committed to writing.[5] Excluding the first provisions, dealing with the Church and public assembly, the rulings are presented in order of social rank. The laws deal first with the king, then move to his household, to his nobles and finally to freemen. These blocks are followed by the personal injury laws (which similarly move vertically from head to toe), and finally by the laws regarding those whose status differs from that of freemen: women, *esnas* and slaves.

Linguistic analysis establishes three distinct chronological layers for this text. The sections (shaded black above) concerning freemen – including a long section on redress for personal injury similar to those found in other laws of early Germanic Europe[6] – are marked by a Germanic syntagm otherwise obsolete in Old English: clauses of restitution often take the dative case where Old English regularly uses nominative/accusative or genitive.[7] Alliteration occurs only twice in this section: 'Gif man þeoh ðurhstingþ' [§67; If a person stabs through a thigh] and 'Gif **w**ælt **w**und **w**eorðeþ' [§68; If a 'welt-wound' occurs]. Apparently (and perhaps counter-intuitively) structure rather than style predominated in the mnemonic preservation.

These clauses concerning freemen represent the oldest stratum, likely preserved – although with emendations – by oral transmission. They were then augmented by regulations addressing the specific legal norms of the Kentish kingdom (shaded grey above). Within these we may find a trace of individual authorship in the alliterative *figura etymologica* (a poetic device in which both noun and verb derive from the same root) used in three clauses to describe restitution due the king: 'twibote gebete' [§9; let him compensate twofold compensation][8] and 'gylde forgylde' [§§10, 13; let him restitute with # restitution]. We have no way of determining whether these statutes were first added orally to a pre-existing core or inserted later in the written version.

In Æthelberht's non-Christian clauses, then, we find stylistic elements that may hark back to a preliterate (and in some statutes pre-Insular) original. As Wormald points out, 'It is impossible to demonstrate that any law existed in an oral version exactly corresponding to its written form; oral versions are by

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5 See Oliver (ed.), *Beginnings of English Law*, pp. 34–41.
6 See extended discussion in Oliver, *Body Legal*.
7 Oliver (ed.), *Beginnings of English Law*, pp. 32–4.
8 Clause numbers from Oliver (ed.), *Beginnings of English Law*; this also provides Liebermann's numeration.

definition irrecoverable.'[9] We can, however, point to certain mnemonics that accord well with what we might expect for laws preserved by oral transmission: first, the top-to-bottom structure of both the laws as a whole and, within them, the personal injury section; second, the simple syntactic structure of repeated 'if . . . then' clauses; finally, the occasional traces of the poetic device of alliteration as an aid to memory. Never again in Old English law will we see a system laid out so clearly: the technology of writing changed forever the way in which law was transmitted. Literacy seems to have obviated the necessity for mnemonic connectivity.

Indeed, the most recent layer of these laws probably was first cast in written form. This stratum contains the opening seven rulings dealing with Church and public assembly; those concerning the Church obviously post-date Æthelberht's conversion. But this section also adheres to a hierarchical ordering, demonstrating the influence of oral mnemonics on early written texts. That these initial stipulations must have been in place at least at the time of Bede is shown by his statement in the *Historia ecclesiastica* (II.5) that Æthelberht began his laws with clauses regarding theft from those associated with the Christian Church. No reason exists to doubt their inclusion in the original written code. Æthelberht's laws provided the foundational legal text for the kingdom of Kent.

According to Bede (*HE*, III.7), Æthelberht's grandson Eorcenberht ordered the destruction of idols and the observance of Lent. The texts of these rulings have not been preserved, if, in fact, they were ever written. The next extant code comes from the brief, joint rule of Hlothhere and Eadric (685), who claim to have 'ecton þa æ þa ðe heora alderas ær geworhton' [added to the laws that their ancestors made].[10] Their first two clauses represent an interesting admixture: the same archaic dative employed in Æthelberht is embedded in more elaborate syntax typical of written laws. Apparently rulings that lived in memory were being emended and updated as they were committed to writing. Hlothhere and Eadric's additions generally concern procedure and financial transactions. The detailed content and elaborate syntax of these clauses indicate that royal law had moved beyond oral transmission to embrace the medium of writing.

The last king to add to the laws of Kent was Wihtred in 725. Most of Wihtred's laws address transgressions concerning the still relatively new Christian Church. On the one hand, his are the first royal laws to regulate

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9 Wormald, '*Exempla Romanorum*', p. 18.
10 Oliver (ed.), *Beginnings of English Law*, p. 127.

penalties for wrongdoings by ecclesiastics and, on the other, they are the first to incorporate a requirement of penance for what might be called civil delicts.[11] This interrelationship of royal and ecclesiastical law is unsurprising, given the constituency of Wihtred's council, described in his prologue as consisting of (arch)bishops, churchmen and noblemen.[12]

The laws of Ine of Wessex (promulgated 688x94), which slightly predate those of Wihtred, contain a similar prologue listing those who provided him with 'geðeahte' [advice] and 'lare' [instruction] so that 'ryht æw and ryhte cynedomas ðurh ure folc gefæstnode and getrymede wæron' [true law and true statutes were established and strengthened throughout our people].[13] Kings were beginning to set laws in consultation with a council both ecclesiastical and secular rather than claiming sole authorship.

The similarities between Ine's and Wihtred's prologues may represent common practice rather than direct influence. Unambiguously, however, Wihtred §23 echoes almost exactly the earlier ruling in Ine §20 concerning the responsibility of an honest traveller to make his presence known: 'If a man [who is] come from afar or a stranger should go off the track, and he then neither calls out nor does he blow a horn, he is to be regarded as a thief, either to be killed or to be redeemed.'[14] The remarkable parallel in both content and wording of these two regulations indicates that Wihtred had access to at least some of Ine's laws. This is the first evidence of transmission of laws taking place not only within but also across kingdoms.

The next extant laws are those set by Alfred at the end of the ninth century. Although recent scholarship has cast doubt on Alfred's own authorship of all the works once attributed to him,[15] two which remain generally accepted are his laws and (at least the preface to) Gregory's *Liber regulae pastoralis*. Although the latter was a treatise instructing bishops how to care for their flocks, Wormald asserts that 'Gregory perceptibly blurred the boundaries of spiritual and secular government. He made copious use of examples from the world of the leaders, judges and kings of Israel.'[16] Alfred followed Gregory's example in the prologue to his laws, which begins with a quotation from Exodus stating: 'Dryhten wæs sprecende ðas word to Moyse' [The Lord spoke these words to Moyse]. Then follow forty-eight clauses drawn from Exodus 20–3; this section

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11 Oliver, 'Royal and Ecclesiastical Law', p. 99.
12 Oliver (ed.), *Beginnings of English Law*, p. 153.
13 Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *English Historical Documents*, p. 364.
14 See Oliver (ed.), *Beginnings of English Law*, pp. 179–80.
15 Bately, 'Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything?'
16 Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 428.

is generally known as Alfred's 'Mosaic prologue'. Employing the poetic construction of ring composition, the prologue concludes: 'Ðis syndan ða domas ðe se ælmihtiga God sylf sprecende wæs to Moyse and him bebead to healdende' [These are the laws that Almighty God himself spoke to Moses and commanded him to hold]. The pivot between ancient and modern law is provided by Alfred's own preface, which then introduces forty-three secular rulings. The collocation ends with seventy-seven paragraphs from the laws of Alfred's ancestor Ine, preserved only in this appendix to Alfred's own laws. The following chart presents the overall layout of Alfred's code. (The manuscript numbers seem to be original, but they do not always match the contextual breakdown; both are given below.)

Overall clause numbers	Manuscript clause numbers	Content
1–49	Alfred's introduction 1–49.5	Mosaic prologue
50	49.6–8	Alfred's preface
	(concluding the introduction)	
51–93	1–43	Alfred's laws
94–170	44–120	Ine's laws

Numerology underlay the structure of many early medieval written texts, and appears to be relevant here.[17] Fifty days (represented by the Mosaic prologue and Alfred's introduction, shaded above in grey) passed between the time that Moses made his sacrifice and subsequently introduced Mosaic law; a similar period elapsed between the Crucifixion and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.[18] The grace of God which manifested itself after fifty days in the Old Testament was renewed with the spiritual promise of salvation in the New. The great lawgiver Moses died at the age of 120 (represented by the combined statutes of Alfred and Ine, shaded above in black), and Bede assumes this determined the number of electors who chose a replacement for Judas in the first chapter of Acts.[19] The composition of the text as a whole thus represents a symbolic numerology perhaps more apparent to the creators than the recipients.

Alfred's preface lays out the methodology that guided his compilation. He consulted rulings made in various synods which 'monegra meniscra misdæda

17 Cf. Howlett, 'Alfredian Arithmetic'.
18 *Bedae libri de templo*, p. 157, *Bedae expositio actuum*, pp. 14–15 (cited in Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 417).
19 *Bedae expositio actuum*, p. 11 (cited in Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 417).

bote gesetton' [fixed the compensation for many human misdeeds], as well as the royal laws of 'my kinsman, King Ine, or of Offa, King of the Mercians, or of Æthelberht, who first among the English received baptism'. Alfred retained 'þa þe me ryhtoste ðuhton' [those which seemed to me most just] and, 'mid minra witena geðeahte' [with the advice of my counsellors], either rejected or updated the rest.[20]

Philological examination of Alfred's text demonstrates how accurate a picture he provided of his legislative approach. Not even Holy Scripture was immune from Alfred's editorial hand. Alfred's departures often find analogues in (near-)contemporary Frankish penitentials;[21] he does not hesitate to adapt his Old Testament model to better suit Anglo-Saxon customs following (near-)contemporary ecclesiastical law.[22]

Alfred's debt to earlier Anglo-Saxon rulers is obvious in his appending Ine's laws to his own. As in the Mosaic prologue, Alfred emends (or augments) where he finds gaps. Alfred followed or adapted Ine in issues such as theft, trading and agriculture, but where a model was lacking in Ine, he consulted earlier Anglo-Saxon legislation for regulations on issues such as sexual offences, liability for lending a weapon used in an assault, violating the peace of assembly and personal injury.[23]

Alfred's personal injury tariffs provide a clear example of how he both drew from and augmented the work of his predecessors.[24] This section can be divided into two parts: the first echoing the head-to-toe structure of Æthelberht, and the second providing new regulations without systematic order. Although clauses of the first group rarely echo either in terminology or amount of restitution the model provided by Æthelberht, they demonstrate one crucial similarity not found elsewhere in Germanic laws: continental laws regulate skull injuries according to whether or not bone splinters from the wound produce a sound when tossed across a street into a metal basin; both Æthelberht and Alfred, however, distinguish between damage to the outer or inner bone structure of the skull.[25] This exclusive correspondence proves that

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20 Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *English Historical Documents*, p. 373.
21 Meaney, 'Ides', p. 161; see also Jurasinski, *Old English Penitentials* (forthcoming).
22 Pratt, *Political Thought*, pp. 231–2 presents an alternative interpretation: that the prologue was designed to 'supply a convincing impression of what law would look like without the benefits of Christian augmentation'.
23 Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 281; see also Pratt, *Political Thought*, pp. 219–20.
24 Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *English Historical Documents*, does not translate the personal injury tariffs. Attenborough (ed. and trans.), *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, does (pp. 86–93), and they are also available in a forthcoming edition by Stefan Jurasinski and Lisi Oliver (Early English Laws Project).
25 Oliver, 'Æthelberht's and Alfred's Two Skulls'.

Alfred was familiar with Æthelberht's regulations. The second section of Alfred's personal injury tariffs points to contemporary influence. Of thirteen regulations on damage to body parts, six are unique but seven find parallels among early Germanic laws only in the *Lex Frisionum* (785x803). Furthermore, Alfred's laws match those of Frisia in the rulings regarding striking off the hand of a thief and a husband's killing his wife without penalty if she is caught in the act of adultery.[26] These regulations support Asser's statement that Frisians were present in Alfred's court.

Alfred's laws rarely represent new legislation. Rather, his collocation places the laws of Wessex within the context of both the religious and the secular past. The promise of salvation ameliorated the sometimes draconian laws of the Old Testament, and some clauses are emended according to Frankish penitentials. Secular judgments draw from, but often revise, previous statutes set by earlier Anglo-Saxon kings; they also demonstrate Frisian influence. In Alfred's laws we see the workings of the cosmopolitan scholarship that influenced Alfred's literary revival. Following the ravages of the invasions of the heathen Danes, English law could align itself with the tradition of Christian law, demonstrate its association with and development from its own past, and draw from contemporary rulings elsewhere to set the model for Anglo-Saxon legislation. God might indeed have spoken to Alfred as he did to Moses in Deuteronomy 4:6: 'For this is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations, that hearing all these precepts they may say, "Behold, a wise and understanding people, a great nation."'[27]

Other than a tendency towards increased stylistic complexity, far more historical than literary importance attaches to the laws of the tenth century. These laws expand on those of Alfred (indicating the continued circulation of this text); an important innovation is the introduction of Scandinavian terminology, particularly in clauses dealing with the Danelaw. Linguistic borrowings include the term *lagh*, from which comes our word 'law'.[28]

The last great writer of Anglo-Saxon law was Wulfstan, bishop of London from 996–1002, archbishop of York from 1002–23, and bishop of Worcester from 1002–16. Wulfstan was the author of the famous *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, in which he attributes the ravages of the Danish invaders to the moral and religious decline of the Anglo-Saxons. He was also a prolific homilist, and the author of the *Institutes of Polity*, which analyses the roles of both secular

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26 Oliver, 'Who Wrote Alfred's Laws?'
27 Cited by Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 427.
28 See Pons-Sanz, *Norse-Derived Vocabulary*.

and ecclesiastical leaders. Wulfstan's laws – for such we might consider them – span the rules of two very different kings. His first legal collocations can be found in the later laws of Æthelred II, and his legislative writing reaches its triumphant conclusion in the 1020/1 code of Cnut.

A clear thematic differentiation can be seen between the early laws of Æthelred and the later laws composed by Wulfstan, demonstrated by the following clauses:

> III Æthelred 8: *And* ælc munetére, þe man tihð, þæt fals feoh sloge, syððan hit forboden wæs, gange to þrimfealdan ordale; gif he ful beo, slea man him.

> [And let every moneyer whom one accuses of striking false coin, since it was forbidden, go to the threefold ordeal; if he be guilty, let him be slain.]

> V Æthelred 24, 26.1: *And* swicollice dæde and laðlice unlaga ascunige man swyðe, þæt is: false gewihta and woge gemeta . . . *and* beo man georne ymbe friðes bote *and* ymbe feos bote æghwar on earde.

> [And let one very much shun deceitful deeds and loathsome abuses, that is, false weights and wrong measures . . . and let one be eager for the improvement of the peace and for the improvement of money everywhere in the land.][29]

The pre-Wulfstanian ruling is precise and secular. Wulfstan addresses the same delict in terms both general and moral: law phrased as a secular homily. The same motivation that underlay Wulfstan's diatribe in the *Sermo Lupi* seems to colour his early view towards law: a recalcitrant people must be returned to Christian mores before they are abandoned by God.

A different impetus drives Wulfstan's later laws. With Cnut's establishment of lasting peace between Danes and English, Wulfstan turned to the 'relaying of the legal foundations on which the kingdom of the English had been built, as the condition of its renewal under fresh management'.[30] His sequence of legal writings culminated in the laws he set for Cnut in 1020/1, which provide a fitting finale to Anglo-Saxon legislation. Wulfstan's framework was his own emendation of Edgar's Law, augmented by rulings from laws of previous kings dating back to the seventh century, including Æthelberht, Alfred, Æthelstan and Æthelred, and incorporating also chapters from his own homiletic writings. Wulfstan's collection is 'thus an attempt both to re-emphasize what he had written – and preached – over the previous fifteen

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29 Trans. Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 450.
30 *Ibid*., p. 463.

years, and to encapsulate, as it were codify, what he considered most important in laws stretching back to the seventh century'.[31] He often couches these statutes in the first person, 'we læreð' [we teach], both demonstrating the king's ultimate authority and echoing the words of the preacher. Wormald points out that 'Homily and law tended to merge into each other as Wulfstan's work went on, and as much because homilies came to make legal demands as because laws gave voice to homiletic admonition.'[32]

Wulfstan draws not only on secular and ecclesiastical prose styles in this great compendium, but also employs the techniques of poetry.[33] Alliteration appears already in the early laws of Æthelred, such as 'ne að ne ordal' [I Æth 1, 2; neither oath nor ordeal] or 'his were ðe his wites' [I Æth 1, 7; his wergild or his fine]. Wulfstan adds Christian innovations, such as 'freolsa and faestena' [V Æth 12, 3 (among many); of holidays and of fasts] or 'to bocan and to bellan' [VI Aeth 51; by book and by bell]. Other Wulfstanian additions are ambiguous as to whether they echo secular tradition or continue religious innovation: for example 'word and weorc' (V Æth 22, 2; VI Æth 28) might be traced to 'verbo et factis' (Romans 15:18) or 'opere et sermone' (Luke 24:19; 2 Thessalonians 2:15), but is also found in *Beowulf*'s 'worda and worca' (289), which might itself, however, have been drawn from biblical sources.

Wulfstan's compilation was not only the last, but arguably the greatest of Anglo-Saxon royal legislation. The conjunction of law, homily and poetic formulation not only provided a culmination to Anglo-Saxon legislation, but in many ways can be seen as one of the great achievements of Anglo-Saxon literature.

Charters

The Anglo-Saxon royal charter (or diploma) distinguishes itself from all other early English legal genres by using Latin as its primary language.[34] Charters provided evidence of donation of property to the grantee, often accompanied

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31 Wormald, 'Archbishop Wulfstan', p. 20; for clause breakdown, see his *Making of English Law*, pp. 356–60.
32 Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 365.
33 Bethurum, 'Stylistic Features'.
34 The online site Kemble (www.trin.cam.ac.uk/chartwww) provides access to recent scholarship. Selected translations can be found in Robertson (ed. and trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Charters*; and Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *English Historical Documents*, pp. 440–92. Important readings include Stenton, *Latin Charters*; W. H. Stevenson, 'Anglo-Saxon Chancery'; Chaplais, 'Origins and Authenticity'; Howlett, *Sealed from Within*; and Lupoi, *Origins*, pp. 145–72. A crucial resource is Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters* (updated

by immunities from royal service such as the responsibility for providing sustenance for the peripatetic royal household, or the right to try a thief caught on the land and retain the concomitant fine. Early benefactors were overwhelmingly religious establishments, and the purpose of the grants was to secure the intercession of the Church for the soul(s) of the donor(s). The donation now became *bocland* (set in writing), distinguished from *folcland* (determined by tradition): no longer inheritable by descent through common law, it belonged in perpetuity to the grantee.[35] The written document provided permanent evidence of an orally declared alienation to avoid later claims on the donated land by the heirs of the donor.

The grant was usually recorded on a sheet of parchment, but could also be entered into margins or flyleafs of religious books. Approximately 290 survive in contemporary or near-contemporary form, or pre-Conquest copies; most of these date from the tenth or eleventh centuries. After the Conquest, many religious houses gathered their charters (or recreations) in cartularies; these provide us with approximately 1,500 charters, some of which are copies of originals, some recreations and some forgeries. We are thus left with a probably skewed vision of the original corpus: charters granting property to laymen were simply not preserved with the same care as those donating property to the Church.[36]

The earliest extant genuine charter records a grant in 675 by Hlothhere of Kent to the religious establishment of Sts Peter and Paul in Canterbury (S7).[37] This document is our first example of written support of transfer of land ownership earlier established by verbal disposition and/or a ritual practice such as placing sod on the altar to represent the transfer. The charter was thus evidentiary in nature: the parchment substantiated the oral or ritual conveyance of ownership. As living memory of the original conveyance passed, the document itself assumed primary force as confirmation of the contract.[38]

The model was the secular Roman private deposition. The introduction of the Anglo-Saxon written deed has been attributed variously to Augustine or to Theodore, both early archbishops of Canterbury.[39] The cosmopolitan centre of Kent almost surely set the precedent for religious establishments introducing permanent documentation of grants in their favour. This hypothesis is

at www.esawyer.org.uk). Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, provides an excellent, if temporally bounded, survey of the uses of charters. For the roles of women in charters, see Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, pp. 80–8.

35 See Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, pp. 31–3.
36 A discussion of degrees of authenticity can be found in Wormald, *Bede and the Conversion of England*; see also Chaplais, 'Origins and Authenticity'.
37 Charters are identified by their number in Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*.
38 See Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, pp. 33–9.
39 See Chaplais, 'Who Introduced Charters'.

supported by documentary remains: most early charters come from Kent, although the usage spread widely throughout southern England in the seventh century.

The earliest grants – those which we might assign to 'phase one' – are simple in form:

1 Invocation (sometimes preceded by a cross, for which later the Chi-Rho symbol for Christ could be substituted).
2 Preamble setting out the reason for making the grant: for example, the duty of almsgiving, the necessity of laying up treasure in heaven, the transitoriness of earthly things.
3 Consent of the *witenagemot* (council).
4 Sanction against those transgressing the grant.
5 Description of the estate.
6 Dating clause.
7 List of witnesses, the name of each being accompanied by the sign of the cross, and sometimes followed by the word *testis*. These witness lists are written in the hand of the scribe; rather than representing signatory agreement, they preserve a scribal record of those present at and thus agreeing to the transaction.

A grant of Hlothhere from 679 (S8) gives a good example of this earliest form of the charter:

✠[*Invocation*] In the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. [*Reason for grant*] I, Hlothhere, king of the people of Kent, grant for the relief of my soul land in Thanet which is called *Westen ae* to you, Brihtwold and to your monastery, [*Description*] with everything belonging to it, fields, pastures, marshes, small woods, fens, fisheries, with everything, as has been said, belonging to that same land ... May you hold and possess it, and your successors maintain it forever. May it not be contradicted by anyone. [*Consent*] With the consent of Archbishop Theodore and Eadric, my brother's son, and also of all the leading men, as it has been granted to you, hold it thus, you and your successors. [*Sanction*] May whoever attempts to contravene this donation be cut off from all Christendom, and debarred from the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ ... And I have both formed the sign of the Cross for its confirmation with my own hand and asked witnesses to subscribe.

[*Dating*] Done in the city of Reculver, in the month of May, the seventh indiction ...[40]

40 For calculation of indiction, see Oliver (ed.), *Beginnings of English Law*, p. 165.

✠Sign of the hand of King Hlothhere, the donor.

[*Witness list*] ✠Sign of the hand of Gumberht, etc.[41]

Several differences exist between the Anglo-Saxon charter and its model. The Roman private deed lacked a prologue, as do many of the earliest charters. Proems can, however, be found in other imperial documents and in papal letters and records; these may have provided the inspiration for the Anglo-Saxon addition. Furthermore, the Roman deed bound the donors to maintain the deed by assigning a financial penalty to anyone who violated its terms; Insular practice replaced this with a sanction threatening divine punishment. Beginning in the eighth century, a benediction on supporters of the grant could also be added. The fact that many charters were drawn up to protect Church property and were generally written by clerics accounts for the increased ecclesiastical nature of their tone.

One salient difference between the Anglo-Saxon charter and those produced on the continent is that the name of the scribe is never mentioned in the Insular document. Like the Roman deed, the Anglo-Saxon charter ends with a list of witnesses; verification thus comes from naming of the witnesses rather than the testimony of the scribe. The Anglo-Saxon charter often includes mention of the consent of counsellors (as in Wihtred's prologue). The agreement of this *witenagemot* was crucial, as the king was removing the land from the regal inheritance and concomitantly diminishing royal revenues.

One final feature of the earliest grants is a lack of definition as to boundaries. The territory to be granted is described in Latin in fairly general terms, as in the charter cited above. Beginning in Wessex in the eighth century, we find more detailed perambulations, still given in Latin. We also begin to see immunities and privileges associated with the land grants; the recipients almost always, however, maintain responsibility for fortress-building, bridge repair and military duty.

The first phase of the Anglo-Saxon charter, then, was marked by utilitarian simplicity. Although the earliest charters may well have been drafted by clerics, we also have evidence that at least some were written by writers in the employment of kings. A grant made in 780 by Oslac, ealdorman of Sussex, is confirmed by an endorsement written in a different hand after 786 in which King Offa agrees to the deposition (S1184). According to Frank Stenton, 'The contrast between the crude provincial script of the text and the practised,

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41 Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *English Historical Documents*, p. 443; see discussion in Chaplais, 'Some Early Anglo-Saxon Diplomas', pp. 65–78.

almost official, hand of the endorsement represents a real distinction between the primitive government of the local kingdom and the beginnings of administrative routine in a court which had become the political centre of England south of the Humber.'[42] We see here a diffusion of literacy from the royal court to provincial territories.

After the reign of Offa, there is a marked decline in the quality of the Latin used in the records; Stenton describes the writers as 'both uninterested in the principles of Latin composition and indifferent to the elementary rules of Latin grammar'.[43] This certainly recalls Alfred's complaint in the prologue to the translation of Gregory's *Liber regulae pastoralis* that the state of learning had already deteriorated before the ravages of the Danes.

The Danish incursions probably account for the fact that we have very few charters from the reigns of Alfred and his son Edgar.[44] Doubtless many earlier charters were also destroyed. Phase two of charter creation then begins, following the Danish wars, with the more settled period under King Æthelstan who, after the accession of Northumbria, could be considered the first king of all England.

The charters of Æthelstan are considerably more elaborate than those of earlier periods, using phraseology which Stenton calls 'artificial language employed to the grievous detriment of good sense'.[45] Compare this particularly florid beginning from a 934 grant to the Church at York (S407) to that of Hlothhere's charter quoted earlier:

> The wanton fortune of this deceiving world, not lovely with the milk-white radiance of unfading lilies, but odious with the gall-steeped bitterness of lamentable corruption, raging with venomous wide-stretched jaws, bitingly rends the sons of stinking flesh in this vale of tears . . .[46]

The proem continues in the same vein. The 'grievous detriment of good sense' indeed.

Keynes argues that 'in the reign of Æthelstan the draftsmen of charters quarried the works of Aldhelm, and glossaries, for grandiloquent phrases and recondite words'.[47] The 'hermeneutic style' was the outcome of these literary

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42 Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 211; see also Chaplais, 'Some Early Anglo-Saxon Diplomas', pp. 85–6.
43 Stenton, *Latin Charters*, p. 40.
44 For Alfred's charters, see Keynes, 'Power of the Written Word', pp. 184–93.
45 Stenton, *Latin Charters*, p. 53.
46 Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *English Historical Documents*, pp. 505–6.
47 Keynes, 'King Athelstan's Books', p. 159; for Aldhelm, see Orchard, *Poetic Art of Aldhelm*. For Welsh noblemen in Æthelstan's witness lists, see Loyn, 'Wales and England'; for Cornwall, see Insley, 'Athelstan'.

gleanings. Although Aldhelm may have provided a primary model, literary phrases were also drawn from later Anglo-Saxon writers. Stenton speculates that these formulations represent 'precisely the sort of language which would naturally have been cultivated by teachers practising in the cosmopolitan environment of Alfred's court. The characteristic style of Athelstan's charters may well reflect the learning of their pupils.'[48]

Some (although not necessarily all) of these charters may have been drawn up by a central staff, as formulas repeat across territories. Keynes hypothesizes that in later Anglo-Saxon England the proliferation of written documents would have required a royal secretariat which was likely 'a permanent office attached to the king's household, staffed by some laymen as well as by priests of the royal chapel'.[49] Although the beneficiary may still have occasionally had influence on the drafting of the deed, ecclesiastical scriptoria no longer had primacy in this regard.

Æthelred II provides further literary innovations: he often adds historical background, explaining why the king made the grant and/or how the land came to be available for deposition. A good example is provided by a charter of 1012 from the *Textus Roffensis* granting land at Fen Stanton and Hilton in Huntingdonshire to Bishop Godwine of Rochester (S926). This document narrates the case of the widow Æthelflæd, whose brother Leofsin tried to claim the property which should have reverted to the king. Leofsin went so far as to kill the king's reeve. On the advice of his counsellors, Æthelred exiled Leofsin and disinherited Æthelflæd. The historical narrative substantiates the king's right to repossess the previous grant.[50]

From early on, not all grants went to religious establishments. Under Æthelred the donation of *bocland* to laymen became more common, and lacked the clerical overtones of his predecessor. Sometimes the charter indicates that a price has been paid for the grant (e.g., S905);[51] apparently the king was selling off land to raise funds.[52]

After the exuberance of Æthelstan and Æthelred we find a reversion to more prosaic, utilitarian forms. Boundary lists in Old English become standard; these provide modern topographers with invaluable descriptions of

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48 Stenton, *Latin Charters*, pp. 54–5; see also Bullough, 'Educational Tradition'; and Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, p. 136.

49 Keynes, 'Royal Government', pp. 256–7; see also Keynes, 'King Athelstan's Books', p. 159, and *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, pp. 39–83, 121–5; and Loyn, *Governance*, pp. 106–17.

50 See Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, pp. 97–104; for historical background, pp. 176–86, 200–2.

51 Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *English Historical Documents*, p. 540.

52 See Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, pp. 107–8.

regional landscapes.[53] Famously, Æthelstan's charter of 931 (S416) mentions both 'Bēowan hammes hecgan' and 'Grendles mere', whose relevance to *Beowulf* has been variously argued.[54] The Latin of the surrounding texts follows conventional formulas across regional borders, which may indicate a central locus of production. Furthermore, the calligraphy is stylized and often a distinction is made between the monumental script of the Latin portions and the smaller script used for the boundary lists. This distinction is representative of royal charters up to the Conquest.

Not all charters represent royal grants. In the second half of the eighth century we begin to get private deeds – scattered charters by laymen and clerics – which follow the same format as their royal counterparts. We also have instances in which owners endorse a royal charter to someone else. Early on the endorsements were in Latin, but beginning in the first half of the ninth century they appear in Old English. The vernacular eventually becomes the language of choice for private legal transactions, including wills and records of dispute settlement. Latin versions of such later documents are usually post-Conquest translations. Only the formal, royal diploma retained Latin as the language of choice, and it eventually became supplanted by the vernacular writ.

Finally, forgeries are in some senses a subgenre of royal diploma, as they reinforce the literary conventions employed by the originals.[55] The favourites of forgers were Æthelstan, who could be considered the first king of all England; Edgar, who was revered for reintroducing monasteries into England after the ravages of the Danes; and Offa of Mercia, the most powerful of the early Anglo-Saxon kings. Offa's genuine charters often served as the model for forgers producing documents purporting to stem from earlier centuries. Conversely, some forgeries can be recognized by the inclusion of features which appeared later than the supposed date of composition, such as dating by incarnation rather than indiction, boundary lists, and relief from specific immunities and service; or perhaps by a witness list inherently contradictory with itself and the purported date.[56]

Another clue to possible forgery is the inclusion of the name of the scribe, which was typical of continental but not Insular practice. Exceptionally literate

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53 See in particular the numerous regional studies by Della Hooke, e.g., *Worcester Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds*.
54 Chambers, *Beowulf*, pp. 42–5.
55 See W. H. Stevenson, 'Forgery of Anglo-Saxon Charters' in 'Anglo-Saxon Chancery'; and Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *English Historical Documents*, pp. 337–43.
56 See Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, pp. 5–6.

forgers occasionally introduced mention of historical events drawn from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Asser's *Life of Alfred* or even William of Malmesbury's Anglo-Norman *Gesta regum Anglorum*. As such references rarely occur in genuine texts, such erudition foils the forger (at least in the hindsight of modern scholarship).

Campbell calls the scribes of forgeries 'careless', 'reckless', 'incompetent', but these strictures are not necessarily limited to forgers.[57] Scribes are subject to human error: for example, a charter which may be a genuine instrument from the reign of Æthelred seems to have been assigned by scribal miscopying to the reign of Eadred (S539). Nor must we consider forgeries to be necessarily mendacious. Several, for example, date from the census of the Domesday Book, and represent – with various degrees of truthfulness – attempts to recreate privileges for which the authenticating document had been lost.

Finally, we must consider the fact that, like a successful murder, a successful forgery may remain undetected.

Writs

The sealed writ was the only legal genre innovated by the Anglo-Saxons; it has also proved to be the most lasting.[58] The writ is a sealed letter – usually, but not always, royal – whose opening phrases follow a standard protocol. Writs were originally used for transmitting administrative orders, but from the time of Cnut (at least) they could also notify appropriate authorities of a grant of land with judicial and financial rights. These later writs thus assumed the function of charters. The writ replaced verification by witness lists with the wax impression of the seal, and only rarely included the former. According to Chaplais, this made the writ 'much superior' to the charter, 'because it bore the royal seal, a visible sign of authenticity which the diploma lacked'.[59] The writ was adapted by Anglo-Norman kings, and continues in altered forms today as a judicial and administrative instrument in Great Britain.

Like the laws (and unlike the charters), writs were overwhelmingly written in Old English. Royal writs would generally have been produced by scribes in

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57 Campbell (ed.) *Charters of Rochester*, pp. xxv–xxvi.

58 Harmer (ed. and trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, provides discussion, editions and translations; see also Bishop and Chaplais (eds.), *Facsimiles of English Royal Writs*. Further translations are scattered throughout Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *English Historical Documents*, pp. 440–53. See further Chaplais, 'Anglo-Saxon Chancery'; and Lupoi, *Origins*, pp. 303–20.

59 Chaplais, 'Anglo-Saxon Chancery', p. 50.

the employment of the king, although some were drawn up by the scriptorium of the ecclesiastical establishment that benefited from that particular proclamation. Of the approximately 120 writs remaining to us, only 14 are extant in Latin alone, although some Old English writs are paralleled by Latin versions. In part, the practice of creating writs in the vernacular was due to function: they were meant to be read aloud at the public assembly, necessitating the use of spoken language for general comprehension. The addressees were often (but not always) either protagonists or officials in the shire courts: among the latter the ealdorman or *eorl* in charge of the court, the shire reeve or, for London, the city/market reeve. We also have several royal writs addressed to archbishops or bishops, more rarely abbots. Additional addressees could include thanes or city-dwellers. It was the beneficiary's duty to produce the document in court before those to whom it was addressed and read the orders aloud to the assembled gathering. The charter differs from the writ in that the former pronounces the king's completed action, while the latter presents to the assembly the king's intentions.[60]

An innovation of the Anglo-Saxon writs was a method of sealing known as 'patent', which allowed the document to be opened with no damage to the seal. Two strips were cut on the bottom of the sheet; the seal was affixed to one and the other was used to tie the letter shut. Thus the writ could be opened and read without compromising the proof of authenticity.[61] The only extant writ with a complete seal still attached is from King Edward to Archbishop Stigand at Christ Church Canterbury (H33; S1088).[62] Into the wax affixed to the upper parchment strip are the obverse and reverse of Edward's seal: although these differ in details, both show the king seated on his throne with the legend '+ SIGILLUM EADVVARDI ANGLORUM BASILEI'. The representation of the monarch in majesty continues to be used with variations on the seals of kings and queens of England to the present day. (Edward's writ itself is only partly original: although the first three lines and the seal are authentic, the remaining text has been altered.) At least as early as the ninth century, we have evidence for seals used by non-royal persons and from ecclesiastic institutions. Although the sealed writ was primarily used by rulers, its use was not restricted to royalty.

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60 Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, pp. 111–14; for the interrelationship between writ and charter in the time of Cnut, see pp. 141–5.

61 See Harmer (ed. and trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, pp. 92–105; Bishop and Chaplais (eds.), *Facsimiles of English Royal Writs*, pp. xi–xiii; and Loyn, *Governance*, pp. 115–18.

62 Writs are identified by their number in Harmer (ed. and trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, and in Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*. All translations are from Harmer.

The Anglo-Saxon writ may have its origin in two sources: the Roman administrative letter and the Germanic custom of giving a token as verification of a message. The former source is embodied in the letter itself; the latter is represented by the authentication provided by the seal. In some instances, seals alone seem to have been used and accepted to confirm unwritten instructions verbally presented by a messenger. In a late tenth-century lawsuit, Æthelred II sent a messenger with his seal to the shire court judges (S1454); moreover, of the sixteen seals mentioned in Domesday Book, nine imply that the seal alone was sufficient to authenticate the verbal instructions of the sender.[63]

Roman emperors and provincial governors commonly used letters for administrative business, which may have been the model for the Anglo-Saxon writ. These Roman letters customarily began with a formula such as 'X to Y *salutem*'. This epistolary form spread to documents announcing papal privileges and also diplomas and mandates of the early Frankish kings. The formula could have come to Anglo-Saxon England as early as the Augustinian mission, sent by Pope Gregory towards the end of the seventh century to convert the pagan Anglo-Saxons. Bede's dedication to the *Historia ecclesiastica* begins: 'Desiderantissimo et reuerentissimo patri Albino, Baeda Christi famulus salutem.'[64]

The customary opening for the Anglo-Saxon writ is more complex than the *salutem* formula. The basic components are:

1 Sign of the cross (optional).
2 'X greets': third-person subject (changed to first person in time of Cnut) + verb *gretan*.
3 Adverb indicating affection/respect: *freondlice* [lovingly], *eadmodlice* [humbly].
4 Addressee. (The positions of 3 and 4 are variable.)
5 Clause of instruction in first person: 'and I tell you that ...'

Anyone who has ever studied Old English will immediately recognize this sequence as the opening of Alfred's preface to the translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*:

> King Alfred commands Bishop Wærferð to be greeted [*hateð gretan*] in words welcoming and friendly [*luflice ond freondlice*], and commands that you be told that I think very often ...

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63 Harvey and McGuiness, *Guide to British Medieval Seals*, p. 4; see also Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred*, pp. 136–40; and Chaplais, 'Anglo-Saxon Chancery', pp. 50–6.
64 Harmer (ed. and trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, p. 26.

Note the similarity also to the opening of Ælfric's English preface to his *Lives of Saints*:

> Ælfric greets [*gret*] humbly [*eadmodlice*] Ealdorman Æðelweard, and I tell thee, beloved sir . . .

Neither of these introductory letters constitutes a writ. They serve to present the subsequent intentions of the author rather than conduct business transactions, and they are not sealed. Nonetheless, they establish the protocol that later Anglo-Saxon writs will follow.

Although our first extant writ dates from approximately one century after the reign of Alfred, it is possible that earlier examples have not been preserved. Evidence for this hypothesis is provided by the ninth-century translation of St Augustine's *Soliloquies* (attributed to Alfred), in which Reason states:

> Consider now if your lord's *ærendgewrit* [business letter] and his *insegel* [seal, from Latin *insigillum*] comes to you, whether you can say that you cannot understand him thereby or recognize his will therein.[65]

Despite the fact that we have no extant writs from the ninth century (perhaps because the concomitant evidentiary charter rendered the original order obsolete), the evidence of this interpolation into the *Soliloquies* and Alfred's own formulaic opening to the translation of the *Pastoral Care* seems to indicate that the convention was at least known, if not in common use.

A writ of Cnut confirming the liberties of Christ Church Canterbury around 1018 (H26; S985) provides one of the first examples of the formulaic opening used for administrative purposes:

> King Cnut sends friendly greetings to [*gret . . . freondlice*] Archbishop Lyfing and Bishop Godwine and Abbot Ælfmær and Æthelwine the sheriff and Æthelric and all my thegns, nobles and commoners. And I inform you [*ic cuðe eow*] that . . .

The specific administrative instruction follows the protocol: the largest number of writs concern grants of estates, privileges or offices. Although the language of conferral is not as fixed as the opening protocol, the subsequent phraseology tends to follow roughly either the pattern *ic kyðe eow þæt . . .* [I declare to you that . . ., e.g., H118], or *ic habbe geunnan þæt* [I have granted that . . ., e.g., H34], followed by the terms of the grant. This declaration indicates the spoken nature of the original message (similar to the phraseology used in wills, discussed later). The grant is often issued *swa full ⁊ swa forð* [as

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65 Adapted from *ibid.*, p. 10.

fully and to the same extent as . . ., e.g., H38, 61], or occasionally *swa forð ⁊ swa fyrmest* [as far as ever possible . . ., e.g., H71]; an exceptionally emphatic writ can even be issued *swa full ⁊ swa forð ⁊ swa fyrmest* (e.g., H64).

   Once the period of the grant has been established, the actual rights to be conferred are enumerated. The most common allot to the beneficiary the legal proceeds resulting from an offence committed in his territory, namely:

1 *Sacu and socn* [cause and suit]. These terms represent the right to hold a private court to deal with offences committed within the grantee's territory, and also to receive the profits of justice arising from such cases. The two terms together have the combined meaning of 'jurisdiction'.
2 *Toll and team* [tax and vouching to warranty]. *Toll* is the right to take a percentage of the sale of cattle and other goods. *Team* is the right to take profits (and perhaps to hold the legal hearing) in a case of vouching to warranty. In this procedure, a person accused of the unlawful possession of cattle or other goods could 'vouch his warrantor': that is, pass on the charge to the person from whom he had acquired the disputed property.
3 *Infangentheof.* The right to try a thief taken on the property and to take the profits.

In the first two instances, Harmer proposes, alliteration was used so that the witnesses in the court could more easily remember the stipulations.[66] This poetic device becomes a more prominent feature in later writs, often accompanied by semantic coupling, as demonstrated by Edward's 1060x1 grant to a new bishop of everything pertaining to the see of Wells (H64; S1111):

> on **w**ode and on **f**elde,
> mid **s**aca ⁊ mid **s**okna,
> **b**innan porte ⁊ **b**utan,
> swo **f**ul and swo **f**orth swo Duducus biscop . . . hit **f**ormest him
> to**f**oren hauede.
>
> [in **w**oodland and in **f**ield,
> with **s**ake and with **s**oke,
> **wi**thin town and **wi**thout,
> as **f**ully and **f**orthrightly as Bishop Duducus . . . **f**irst had it be**f**ore him.]

This series provides a masterly example of poetic form used in legal diction. The first line uses terms beginning with labial consonants to conjoin opposites forming a totality (all land comprises wood or field); the second alliterates the

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66 *Ibid.*, pp. 85–92.

legal rights of sake and soke; the third both employs conjunction of opposites to describe a totality and alliterates; and the last line finishes the formulation with an alliterative hypermetric poetic line. This verse deserves a place among the Anglo-Saxon minor poems.

In addition to the proceeds from legal procedures, the king could also transfer royal dues. These vary according to the jurisdiction of the king in specific territories. Continuing the list of privileges enumerated above, he owned and thus could grant:

4 Everywhere the right to fines for *flymena fyrmth* [harbouring of fugitives].
5 In Wessex and Mercia, the payments for *hamsocn* [forcible entry into or attack on a house], *mundbryce* [breach of protection], and *fyrdwite* [fine for neglect of military service].
6 In the Danelaw additionally the fine for *grithbryce* [breach of the king's peace; *grith* is a Scandinavian loanword], and/or *fihtwite* [fine for fighting].

Many, although not all, writs end with clauses similar to those employed by the papal chancery, which may be – as with the charters – an indication of ecclesiastical influence. The first option was a prohibition against disregarding the conferred privileges, along the lines of 'Ic nelle geþafian þæt ænig man misbeode ...' [H51; S1103; I do not permit any man to violate ...]. The prohibition can be followed, although rarely is, by a benediction which confers eternal blessings on the person adhering to the terms of the grant. More common is an anathema which assigns punishment in the spiritual sphere to anyone transgressing the clauses of the writ. Both of these are illustrated by a late tenth-century writ of Abbot Wulfwold of Bath (H6; S1427):

> And if anyone shall increase my gift [*mine gyfe geéce*], that I have given to St Peter's monastery, may God Almighty increase his life in this world [*geéce his life her on worulde*], and when he departs hence may Christ give him as a reward the kingdom of heaven [*gife him Christ heofona rice to medes*]. And if anyone should purpose to diminish it [*hit þence to litlianne*], may God Almighty bring him low in this world [*gelitlige hine God elmihtig her on worulde*], and when he must depart hence, may his dwelling be in the abyss of hell [*on helle grunde*], unless before his end he make amends for it as stringently as possible [*buton he hit ær his ende þe stiðlicor gebete*].

The man who increases (*geéce*) the gift, him will God similarly *geéce* in this life; but the man who seeks to diminish it (*hit to litlianne*), him will God likewise *litlian* in this life. The anathemas generally dictate a punishment in the afterlife, as in the above warning that the transgressor will spend his afterlife in *helle grunde*.

An uncommon, but more immediate, threat to those who disregard the stipulations of the grant is provided in a mid-tenth-century writ in which Edward Confessor affirms his grant of *soke* to St Edmund's (H19; S1079): 'ich wille gewytan þaes mannes nama þe wyle God refian and Sayntt Edmond and me' [I will know that man's name who wishes to rob God and St Edmund and me]. Whereas the anathema promises punishment in the afterlife, this unusual formulation threatens immediate retribution for violating the privileges granted by Edward's writ. It may serve as a salutary reminder that the written document represented the spoken command of the monarch.

Wills

Anglo-Saxon wills differ in many significant respects from contemporary wills, whose salient features are the written instantiation and the naming of an executor.[67] The wills remaining to us from the Anglo-Saxon period represent, rather, a written confirmation of a verbal deposition, the latter of which has the binding force of a contract. The formal deposition of property is the oral proclamation; the scribal report is simply an evidence document, thus the written substantiation alone has no power to be revoked or transferred (unless, presumably, both testator and grantee agree). In some senses, then, this written document matches the function of the seal for writs: it serves as the token that authenticates the contract, but does not itself represent the legal pact. Just as the charter was initially an evidentiary document rather than a deed, the written forms of both charters and wills became increasingly important as witnesses to the original transactions died off.

Our earliest extant Anglo-Saxon wills date from shortly after 800, although most are later. Only fifteen are preserved in contemporary form, but cartularies add more than fifty in Old English and another twelve in Latin. We also find frequent references elsewhere to wills that have not been preserved. A relatively large proportion of Anglo-Saxon wills were written by women, which supports the hypothesis that women in Anglo-Saxon England enjoyed considerably higher legal status than women of the later Middle Ages.[68] Of the

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67 Hazeltine, 'General Preface', p. vii. Editions, translations and discussion of most Anglo-Saxon wills can be found in Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, which includes H. D. Hazeltine's excellent 'General Preface'. Further translations are scattered throughout Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *English Historical Documents*, pp. 440–53. See also Keynes, 'Royal Government', pp. 251–5; and, for the role of women, Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, pp. 101–20.

68 See Fell, *Women*. For discussion of women's wills, see van Houts, *Memory and Gender*, pp. 102–10.

thirty-nine wills edited by Dorothy Whitelock, twenty were created by lay-men, five by (arch)bishops, eleven by women and four by husband and wife. The bequests in most wills represent a bilateral contract between the testator and the Church: the layperson donates property to the Church in exchange for masses performed for the immortal preservation of his or her soul and often those of kin. Hazeltine succinctly summarizes the mutual benefits of this arrangement: 'The men of this world want things in the next; while the men of the next world want things in this . . . The gift of the layman is land; the gift of the clergy is the care of the soul by spiritual services.'[69] On the one hand, the preservation of written wills may be due to the desire on the part of ecclesias-tical institutions to document these contractual donations of property. On the other hand, most of the wills written in Old English attest to the oral nature of the process. This provides an unusual scenario: the documentation is written by clerics in the vernacular Old English rather than their customary Latin.

Often but not always, wills – like writs – employ the phrase *ic cwide* [I declare], which demonstrates their oral origin. The document itself eventually came to be known as a *cwide*. The purpose of the documentation thus differed from that of the charter granting land. In the latter case, the delivery of the written deed authenticated the legal transfer of rights to the land in the presence of witnesses. In the case of the will, the contract itself had been previously concluded by the oral declamation, and the conveyance of the evidentiary written document was secondary. (In rare cases, the will was originally cast in writing, presumably because the testator, in extremis, was unable to summon the necessary witnesses. In this case, the written document itself stood as testimony to the testator's desires.[70])

Many, although not all, wills were chirographs: duplicates written on a single sheet of parchment, originally with the word *chirographum* (hand-written document) – later replaced by names or decoration – transcribed between the copies. If evidence of authenticity was needed later, the seg-ments could be pieced together to recreate the original. The first copy would be deposited with the donor, the second with the principal donee, and the third (if there was one) with either another principal donee or a disinterested party, perhaps an (uninvolved) ecclesiastical establishment, or even royal administra-tors. For example, sometime before 1038, Thurketel granted Palgrave and half of Whittingham to St Edmund's, with the other half of Whittingham going to the bishop (W24; S1527).[71] The will finishes with the statement that 'there are

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69 Hazeltine, 'General Preface', p. xx.
70 Keynes, 'Royal Government', p. 253.
71 Wills are identified according to their number in Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, from which I also take the translations.

three of these documents: one is at Bury St Edmunds; the second the bishop has; the third Thurketel himself has'. Although the oral form of the will was binding, written substantiation expanded with the growth of literate and documentary culture.

Unlike writs or charters, the format of the will was not fixed. This may, again, point to the oral nature of the original contract, which is simply documented rather than formalized. Although the precise wording is variable, four major features appear in most wills.

1 The mark of the cross often, but not always, introduces the document. This symbol fulfils two functions: first, it signifies that the testator recognizes his sworn word before God as he yields up his spirit; second, it symbolizes the ecclesiastical authority represented by the recording scribe.

2 Next comes the pronouncement of the donor's name (or those of the donors in the case of husband and wife). These invocations approximately follow one of three forms:

   a 'This is the will of X . . .' as 'þis is Alfgares quide . . .' (W2; S1483).
   b 'I, X, declare in this document how I have granted my estates and my possessions . . .' as 'Ic Æþelstan æþling geswutelige on þysum gewrite hu ic mine áre 7 míne æhta geunnen hæbbe . . .' (W20; S1503).
   c 'In this writing is declared how X (and his wife Y) granted . . .', as 'Her is geswutelod on þisum gewrite hú Ordnoð 7 his wif geuðan . . .' (W5; S1524).

Unlike the formulaic openings to writs, these proclamations are natural variations on the announcement of purpose: they are not verbally fixed, nor are the variations significant. The opening often employs the first-person pronoun. Although some wills use the first person throughout, others shift to the third person. Sometimes this difference is a matter of content: the testator uses the third person when addressing a person of higher status as a sign of respect, but changes to the first person when addressing those of parallel or lower rank. Other times the difference may simply depend on whether the scribe is actually taking down dictation or recording the content as he recalls it. Only rarely is the invocation accompanied by a list of those present at the oral deposition (e.g., W11; S1511).

One central function of the will is to alienate property which may have been granted to the testator by an overlord. The lord's agreement to the testamentary disposition of property was crucial to the legitimacy of the will. Many Anglo-Saxon wills thus begin with the return of *heriot* – originally the equipment needed to arm the grantee of the estates in battle, but subsequently extended in meaning to all gifts by a lord to his man – in exchange for the right to leave the remaining possessions of the testator elsewhere.

The will of Alfgar (W2; S1483) clearly delineates this practice: he not only grants to his lord three stallions and various weapons, including the sword left him by King Edmund, but also invokes the interpretation by the local bishop and ealdorman that this return of *heriot* allows him to leave the remainder of his property elsewhere.

While wills made by men leave *heriot* only to the king, wills made by women, either with or without their husbands, often include gifts to the queen. For example, Ælfgifu leaves the queen 'a necklace of a hundred and thirty mancuses and an armlet of thirty mancuses, and a drinking-cup' (W8; S1484); and the husband and wife team of Brihtric and Ælfswith grant the queen 'an armlet of thirty mancuses of gold, and a stallion, for her advocacy that the will might stand' (W11; S1511).

Generally following (although occasionally preceding) the gift to the over-lord is the bilateral contract with the Church, in which property is given in return for the consideration of the testator's soul. An interesting example is provided in Ælfgifu's will, in which she grants land to Bishop Æthelwold in exchange for intercessory prayers for herself and her mother, and further leaves the income from other estates to her children, with the land to revert to the Church upon their deaths in exchange for commemorative prayers for herself and her 'royal lord'. These stipulations demonstrate two common features of bequests, and one less common. Among the former is donating land to the Church in exchange for prayers for the soul of the departed and also the souls of the testator's relatives. Another frequent type of donation can be seen by the granting of land to offspring (or other family) for use during their lifetime (usufruct), with that land later to revert to the Church. The less usual feature of Ælfgifu's bequest is that the land will revert to the Church after the death of her children in consideration not only of her own soul, but also of that of the king. Ælfgifu thereby doubles her insurance that the king will honour her will: not only does he receive the present *heriot*, but also the future intercession for his own immortal soul.

The features listed above appear in almost all Anglo-Saxon wills. Many extend these bequests of land (either in perpetuity or in usufruct with the land eventually to pass to a religious establishment) to donations of personal items. While men were more likely to leave weapons (valuable heirlooms, such as Beowulf's sword Nægling), women would often list household goods, providing an invaluable glimpse into the establishments of Anglo-Saxon nobles. For example, sometime around 950, Wynflæd (W3; S1539) leaves to various women articles of clothing and clothes chests, household draperies and tapestries, 'her best holy veil and her best headband' and a

spinning box. Lumped together outside these specific bequests are 'books and such small things'.[72]

The bestowal of Wynflæd's personal (and specifically feminine) possessions upon women of her circle emphasizes both the testamentary power of women, and the closeness of the testator to her inheritors. Wynflæd was associated with the nunnery of (probably) Shaftesbury, which may explain the books in her possession. But her casual deposition of books along with kitchen utensils indicates that the impressive manuscripts which have managed to survive the depredations of time do not represent a complete inventory of personal manuscripts circulating among the nobility.

Wills sometimes also refer to the freeing of slaves. Such manumissions often apply to penal slaves: freemen who have assumed the temporary status of slavery to pay a legal debt. However, other slaves can also be freed by testamentary disposition, although the degree of this freedom may not be absolute. For example, Wynflæd frees Wulfwaru unconditionally, but Wulfflæd only on the condition that she serve Æthelflæd and Eadgifu.

Finally, we find the occasional anathema, such as in the will of Ælfgar (W2; S1483):

> And I beseech whoever may then be king, for the love of God and all his saints, that let my children do what they may, they may never set aside the will which I have declared for my soul's sake. And if anyone alter it, may he have to account for it with God and the holy saints to whom I have bequeathed my property, so that *he it nefre ne bete buten on hell wite se þis quide awende* [he who shall alter this will may never repent it except in the torment of hell], unless I myself alter it before my death.

Ælfgar seems to have entertained some mistrust of the next generation, despite the fact that he granted his children almost all of his property either outright or with usufruct. The disposition, however, was hardly equal. His eldest daughter, Æthelflad, received seven properties in usufruct; his second daughter similarly received four; and his son Ælfwold was left one estate outright. The second daughter (Ælfflad) is never actually named in this document; however, Ælfgar states that in the case of her early demise, the usufruct should pass to her husband, Byrhtnoth. This same Byrhtnoth would later become ealdorman of Essex, and subsequently be commemorated in poetry as the doomed hero of the Battle of Maldon in 991. Perhaps Ælfgar's plea to the king was meant to prevent his powerful son-in-law from dispossessing the rightful heirs after Ælfgar's death.

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72 For further discussion, see Fell, *Women*, pp. 41–5, 95–6.

Ælfgar's will demonstrates the utility of these written depositions for reconstructing the history of Anglo-Saxon England. We can trace the owner-ship of some of the aforementioned properties through the wills of his daughters Æthelflad (*c.* 975; W14; S1494) and Ælfflad (*c.* 1002; W15; S1486). Furthermore, Ælfgar's reference to his son-in-law Byrhtnoth is not the only testamentary connection to the Battle of Maldon. Leofwine, son of Wulfstan, who made his will in 998 (S1522),[73] held property in the vicinity of Maldon. This Wulfstan may have been the man whom Byrhtnoth assigned to guard the causeway at the Battle of Maldon.

Law in action

We know of around 180 pre-Conquest lawsuits, recorded in charters, chronicles and Domesday Book, or extracted from narrative sources.[74] All but nineteen post-date 871, and somewhere between a quarter and a third date from Æthelstan's reign. These cases generally concern property disputes, but can also touch on offences against the law and the penalties therefore. Two significant features distinguish Anglo-Saxon records from their continental counterparts: they follow no fixed form, and they do not cite written laws.[75] This chapter ends with a brief discussion of two of the most interesting legal narratives of the Anglo-Saxon period, as they address many points discussed earlier.[76]

The first is drawn from a short charter from the reign of Cnut (S1462); it concerns a family dispute in Herefordshire.[77] Edwin appeared in the shire court to lay claim to lands belonging to his mother. As a woman, she was not present in the meeting, and is never actually named. When the presider asked who would stand as her representative, Thurkill stepped forward, but claimed no knowledge of the suit. Three thanes were sent to get the mother's testimony. In their presence, she declared she owned no land that belonged at all to her son ('nān land næfde þe him āht tō gebyrede'), and proceeded to grant all of her property upon her death ('æfter mīnon dæge') to her kins-woman Leoffled. She then instructed the thanes to announce her will to the

73 Keynes (ed.), *Facsimiles of Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. 14.
74 For discussion of Anglo-Saxon lawsuits, see Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 143–61, 'Charters', and 'Handlist'.
75 For contemporary Frankish practice, see Rio, *Legal Practice*.
76 Other cases are discussed in Keynes, 'Royal Government', pp. 245–51.
77 See Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, pp. 101–20 with source references p. 142, note 1. Textual citations are from Whitelock (ed.), *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader*, pp. 57–8.

assembly and charge them all to stand as witness ('ābēodað mīne ǣrende tō ðām gemōte . . . and biddað heom eallum bēon þisses tō gewitnesse'). The assembly accordingly granted her the land free of claim ('clǣne'), and Thurkill recorded the will in a Bible residing in the minster of St Æthelberht.

The motives underlying this deposition may be coloured by the fact that Thurkill was himself the husband of the beneficiary, Leofled. The procedures of the case are, however, straightforward. Edwin's claim was made orally in the assembly; his mother's oral will was witnessed by three thanes who reported the deposition to the assembly; the judgment was then committed to writing as evidentiary substantiation in the archives of the local religious establishment.

The second case is recorded in the 'Fonthill Letter' (S1445), written to Edward the Elder by a layperson requesting legal judgment.[78] It can be briefly summarized as follows: Helmstan stole a belt, and during the subsequent proceedings for theft, Æthelhelm laid claim to property at Fonthill. Helmstan showed his godfather Ordlaf a royal charter confirming the sale of this land by the widow Ætheldryth to Oswulf (whose relation to Helmstan is never explained). Æthelhelm pressed the suit, so they took the case to Alfred whom they found in his chambers washing his hands. Alfred fixed a day for Helmstan to take an oath on the veracity of his statement. Ordlaf helped Helmstan assemble his group of oath-supporters; in exchange Helmstan gave Ordlaf the Fonthill *boc*, but retained usufruct for life.

After Alfred's death, Helmstan continued his criminal career by stealing oxen. (As a thief and a king's man, Helmstan's property would be forfeit to the king.) Helmstan fled to Alfred's tomb and brought back an *insigle* [seal] to Ordlaf, who persuaded Edward (now king) to leave the ownership of the property as his father Alfred had determined. (A later note indicates that Æthelhelm renounced his claim.)

This unique letter is a precious preservation; in the mid-twelfth century it was labelled 'inutile' and probably would have been discarded if the archivist had been more assiduous. Nicholas Brooks supposes that its uniqueness may be due simply to the overwhelmingly ecclesiastical nature of extant Anglo-Saxon charters: no royal or aristocratic archives have survived.[79] That the scribe was not professional is indicated by the 'awkward and unpracticed' script;[80] this also implies that the document itself is an original. The author is probably Ordlaf, who either wrote the document himself or hired a scribe.

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78 This discussion draws largely on Brooks, 'Fonthill Letter'; see also Pratt, *Political Thought*, pp. 239–40.

79 Brooks, 'Fonthill Letter', p. 306.

80 *Ibid*., p. 307.

This narrative presents a vivid picture of law in action. The widow Ætheldryth had disposition of the property because it was part of her morning-gift. Helmstan was able to produce the charter, which provided evidence of the land transfer but did not itself function as a deed. The informality of the setting in which they found Alfred washing his hands indicates that this meeting had no formal judicial function. Alfred set the time for Helmstan to officially claim the land by oath. One might infer that Helmstan bribed his godfather to stand with him in the oath by making him the residual beneficiary for the Fonthill property. No royal legislation is cited in the suit; judgment relied on the king's spoken word. When Helmstan fled to Alfred's tomb, he returned with a seal, whose purpose was presumably to represent the original judgment of the king. Brooks suggests that this seal may have verified the performance of penance or an oath upon relics.[81]

Helmstan's case shows a lively interaction between tactile evidence provided by will, charter and seal, augmented by the verbal authority of the oath-swearing. (Not to mention the extra-legal features of influence-peddling and bribery!) Written, visual and oral evidence interweave to produce a tapestry of law in action that echoes the interlace structure of both Anglo-Saxon poetry and art. Significantly absent, typically for Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence in action, is any reference to recorded legislation.

Conclusion

Although royal laws may often have served more as legal, even literary, monuments rather than integral elements in the quotidian functioning of legal process, they set the tone for societal regulation. Homicide, theft, rape were all offences against society, regarding which later laws echoed or expanded on earlier regulations. Royal laws reflect the move from individual Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to a unified English people. New historical parameters required the addition of statutes concerning, for example, the adoption of Christianity, the possibility of counterfeiting monies, and the relationship with Danish settlers. The literary nature of the royal laws paralleled changing conventions in other genres: styles moved from adaptation of oral formulations to hermeneutic to homiletic following the changing tastes of Anglo-Saxon literary circles.

Grants of land and privileges present a different trajectory. The earliest charters were composed in Latin, as were their continental models. With the

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81 *Ibid.*, p. 312.

centralization of the royal court, documentary writs in Old English vernacular replaced Latin charters, reflecting the need of local judicial meetings to understand the verbal commands of the distant king. Confirmation was no longer provided by a list of witnesses present at the transaction, but rather by the physical token of the royal document with its authenticating seal. Oral testimony thus gave way to tangible evidence. The language of the Church ceded to the vernacular, and oral proclamation to written evidentiary document.

Finally, individual transaction of inheritance remained in the first instance determined by spoken declaration, although documentary preservation attained primacy when witnesses to the deposition died off.

As demonstrated by the lawsuits discussed above, orality remained crucial to the process of law throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. Kings proclaimed their laws and announced specific instructions in charters or writs; individuals spoke their wills in the presence of witnesses. But increasingly, documentary substantiation not only reflected these declarations, but grew in importance as administration of the widespread and growing kingdom became increasingly dependent on the permanence provided by written evidence.

Chapter 21

Latinities, 893–1143

DAVID TOWNSEND

We cannot fully comprehend any progression of English-language texts between the tenth and the twelfth centuries without considering the effects of a profound and complex interlingualism. Relations with texts in other insular languages – and often most powerfully with those in Latin, the artificially acquired language of high culture – will inflect any literary trajectory we might trace, at least as extensively as will narrowly intralingual dynamics. The cultural capital of vernacular literary production necessarily stands in a series of shifting and specifically negotiated relations with an artificially mastered, and so in some sense always alienated, Latinity.

At the same time, we would do well to reinterpret the problematically inexact construct of 'Anglo-Latin literature' as a particular tranche of English literary production, in full awareness of the horizontal continuities it intersects: above all, the continuous alternative possibility of the English vernacular; but also the increasingly subaltern vernacular possibilities of Welsh and Irish; the privileged position of Old Norse at the Anglo-Danish court in the eleventh century; the increasingly subaltern status of English itself in the decades following 1066 (a status which nevertheless bears continued interrogation in relation to the rhetorical pragmatics of individual texts); and the permeability of the Insular Latin tradition to continuous interaction with continental texts, writers and readers throughout our period (both before and after the abrupt consolidation of Norman cultural hegemony and with it the greatly enhanced status of Norman French).

We might then best at the outset define Latinity not as a simple quantitative index of learned facility in Latin (which would suggest analysis of a single continuum of more or less sophisticated attainment), nor as the sum of peculiarities of vocabulary, grammatical usage, style or lines of textual influence (which would suggest a description of eccentricities apart from their function in specific textual communities), but as a strategy of agency: namely, of the concrete prosecution of cultural work, by which the capital of literary

expression is produced, transferred, acquired and contested. If such dynamics of production and exchange are only meaningful in relation to the communities that imbue literary artefacts with value, it is more useful to speak not of Latinity as an enduring given, but rather of plural Latinities articulated in concrete relation to the variable circumstances of vernacular culture. It is precisely the alienated, artificial aspect of Latin expression that renders it an effectively flexible tool of cultural manipulation and power – in ways that often suggest analogies, however inexact, with the spread and deployment of metropolitan languages in the modern world, English most notably among them.[1] Rather than taking the decision to write in Latin as an unproblematized given, we do better to confront the continuous possibility, from at least the late ninth century until the abrupt deprivileging of English some two hundred years later, that an Anglo-Latin author could plausibly have chosen to write in English, and that his or her stylistic choices are themselves significant and socially productive, whether or not s/he was fully conscious of the strategies such decisions embody. Even in the wake of 1066, we do well (especially as current research emphasizes continuities in twelfth-century vernacularity) to attend to the specific circumstances, in given local milieux, of why and how the vernacular was putatively foreclosed.

Earlier chapters in this *History* address the long ninth-century hiatus in the English production of Latin texts after Aediluulf's *De abbatibus*. While this gap is most obviously explained by the effects of the Viking depredations, it is worth observing that the prevalence of a military explanation in modern scholarship replicates the politically invested accounts of the late ninth-century Alfredian texts themselves, notably Alfred's own celebrated preface to his translation of Gregory's *Cura pastoralis* and Asser's *Vita Ælfredi* of 893, the first monument of a literary resurgence that would continue into the early eleventh century, and the first text on which we focus in the present account.

Metropolitan language, variant identities: Asser's Life of Alfred

To begin with, Asser already blurs the strict limits of Anglo-Latin as somehow representative of a 'national' tradition in any anachronistic sense: this first major text after a silence of some generations is the work of a Welsh churchman invited into the service of a West Saxon king with strategic implications that the text itself is at pains to describe in some detail. It dates from precisely

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1 Mehan and Townsend, '"Nation" and the Gaze'.

the moment when a plurality of English kingdoms is about to be elided into the political unity of lasting West Saxon hegemony, and when the linguistic diversity of multiple dialects begins to recede into an increasingly standard West Saxon first promulgated by the translation programme so panegyrically documented by this very work.[2] As such, the *Vita Ælfredi* hardly represents the rebirth of an ongoing tradition but rather stands as fresh departure and a nuanced negotiation of linguistic and ethnic difference, in the context of simultaneously consolidated West Saxon power.[3]

Despite the text's limited circulation, we have clear evidence of its influence through the first half of the twelfth century. Byrhtferth of Ramsey knew the work in the early eleventh century, since he drew on it as a source for a pastiche of historical materials that was in turn later incorporated into the *Historia regum* of Simeon of Durham (d. *c*. 1130).[4] The Flemish author of the *Encomium Emmae reginae* knew the work when he wrote in the 1040s.[5] In the early twelfth century, John of Worcester drew on it in his own chronicle, and the anonymous author of a Bury St Edmunds production, the *Annals of St Neots*, also knew Asser's work.[6]

The profoundly accretive, juxtapositional composition of Asser's text has suggested to some an unfinished work or even a forgery.[7] Others have instead read its apparent disjointedness as itself enacting Asser's assertion of textual authority: these latter readers see embodied in the work a practice of interpretively mature anthologization parallel with Alfred's own growing interpretive maturity, as represented most palpably by his compilation, under Asser's tutelage, of a commonplace book.[8]

Asser concludes his account of Alfred's florilegium (chap. 89) with the observation: 'Quem enchiridion suum, id est manualem librum, nominari voluit, eo quod ad manum illum die noctuque solertissime habebat . . .' [He wanted this to be called his 'enchiridion' – that is, his handbook – since he kept it at hand most adroitly both day and night]. The text's general predilection for unresolved juxtaposition is here instantiated at the level of close detail, both in the introduction of an ostentatiously learned Greek term, followed immediately by a gloss in plain Latin, and by the eccentric use of the adverb

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2 Discenza, 'Wealth and Wisdom'.
3 Townsend, 'Cultural Difference'.
4 Lapidge, 'Byrhtferth of Ramsey'.
5 Campbell (ed. and trans.), *Encomium Emmae reginae*, pp. xxxv–xxxvii.
6 Stevenson, 'Introduction' to Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, p. lvii.
7 Galbraith, 'Who Wrote Asser's Life of Alfred?'; Whitelock, *Genuine Asser*; A. P. Smyth, *King Alfred the Great*.
8 Lerer, *Literacy and Power*, chap. 2; Townsend, 'Cultural Difference'.

'sollertissime'. First, it is not clear from this sentence whether the Greek 'enchiridion' is to be attributed to Alfred himself or has been imported by Asser as narrator: that is to say, whether it is spliced awkwardly into the flow of the narrative as an example of disparate materials held together by Alfred's erudite, authoritative synthesis, or (equally awkwardly) as a display of Asser's own synthetic activity as an intellectual power behind the throne. Second, we might understand the explanatory gloss 'id est manualem librum' as intended for the benefit of a transnational Latin audience without much Greek, or else as a calque on the West Saxon vernacular 'handboc' which would have denoted the volume in Alfred's own conversation. Third, 'sollertissime' collocates jarringly with a verb, 'habebat', that implies not hermeneutic activity but simple physical retention: to say that Alfred holds onto the hand-book intelligently, ingeniously or expertly (all plausible translations of the adverb) is to ambiguate the progress of interpretive authority beyond letter to inner meaning, beyond signifier to signified, that the episode as a whole works to suggest the king has achieved.

Alfred's status, in other words, here oscillates indefinably between subject of the text and object of its representation. The focalization of culture lies indeterminately between the newly articulated authority of revived West Saxon learning under the king's sponsorship and the perspective of a Welsh cleric and audience who regard English language and subjectivity as decentred phenomena in an ethnically and linguistically diverse field. A similar point might be made of Asser's decreasingly Anglocentric practice, as the text progresses, of glossing place names in a combination of English, Welsh and Latin. So also, Asser qualifies Alfred's lordship over the Welsh as a function of complex local contingencies rather than as a stable attainment of absolute authority. Such cultural dislocations are already dramatically adumbrated near the very outset of the work: in the midst of his opening chapter's free adaptation of Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's entry for 855, Asser gratuitously imports a passage from Sedulius' *Carmen paschale* on the 'absurd Geta' of Roman comedy, indulging a spectacularly oblivious misreading of the Germanic mythological 'Geata' in the catalogue of Alfred's ancestors.

Performing the authority of erudition: Latinities of Benedictine Reform

In contrast to Asser's secular milieu, Latin in tenth-century England is over-whelmingly dominated by the literary aims of reformed Benedictine monasti-cism, as imported from the continent and fostered by a cluster of energetic and

overwhelmingly influential bishops and their royal supporters among Alfred's later successors to the West Saxon throne. Oda, archbishop of Canterbury from 941 to his death in 958, stands first among these figures. Oda's long sojourn at the great abbey of St-Benoît-sur-Loire at Fleury (itself earlier reformed from Cluny), and his exposure there to the deliberately abstruse stylistics of, among others, Odo of Cluny and Abbo of St-Germain,[9] would have informed the tastes by which he was led to retain a learned Frank, Frithegod (or Fredegaud, according to the presumed original continental form of his name)[10] as a leading literary light of his episcopal court. Frithegod's *Breviloquium vitae beati Wilfredi*, a verse paraphrase in just under 1,400 hexameters of a more widely known eighth-century prose text, is the earliest major monument among a cluster of tenth-century English Benedictine Latinities. All three surviving manuscripts appear to derive from a Canterbury milieu, and one to be an autograph of Frithegod himself. Oda himself wrote the prose preface to Frithegod's text.

The next thread in the web of Benedictine patronage that extended over the following two generations leads from Oda to his nephew Oswald, as whose tutor Frithegod served, and who would become bishop of Worcester from 961 and archbishop of York from 972. Oswald in turn would found Ramsey, a house closely associated with the further binding of Anglo-Latin literary culture to the emerging traditions of Fleury by the hospitality it extended in 985–7 to Abbo of Fleury, whose Life of the East Anglian Edmund, king and martyr (d. 869), was produced during his two-year English sojourn as scholar-in-residence. Abbo would there become the mentor of and chief intellectual influence on Byrhtferth of Ramsey, later the preceptor of that abbey's school and author of a *vita* of Oswald written within a few years of the saint's death in 992.

The triumvirate of monastic reform bishops in the generation after Oda was completed by Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester from 963–84, and by Dunstan, Oswald's predecessor as bishop of Worcester and archbishop of Canterbury from 960–88. Chief among Æthelwold's literary protégés were Lantfred (himself probably yet another product of Fleury),[11] whose prose account of the translation and miracles of St Swithun promoted the saint's newly established Winchester shrine,[12] and Wulfstan the Cantor, whose *Narratio metrica de S. Swithuno* versifies Lantfred's prose and who wrote as well a prose Life of

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9 Lapidge, 'Hermeneutic Style', p. 72.
10 Lapidge, 'Frankish Scholar'.
11 Lapidge (ed.), *Cult of St Swithun*, pp. 218–22.
12 Lapidge, 'Hermeneutic Style', pp. 86–7.

his patron Æthelwold in the years shortly following his master's death. In the latter years of the tenth century, a further text associated with Canterbury is the earliest Life of Dunstan, written by an author who identifies himself only as 'B.'. The author appears to have served in the retinue of Dunstan until some time around 960, after which he lived and worked in Liège – itself an important centre of self-consciously learned and elaborate Latin style that also produced the prolific and notoriously contentious Rather of Verona (*c.* 887–974). A letter by the same B. dating from the 980s attempts to garner renewed English patronage by appeal to Æthelgar, bishop of Selsey and abbot of the New Minster at Westminster; the *vita* itself is addressed to Ælfric, archbishop of Canterbury from 995. Neither of these appeals seems to have been successful, and B. would appear to have produced his biography while still at Liège, some thirty-five years or more after his departure from England and the period of his personal acquaintance with the saint.[13]

All these texts – and indeed nearly all English Latinities of the tenth century with the exception of the Latin works of Ælfric of Eynsham – have often been classed together under the label 'hermeneutic', a term whose application here has little to do with a mode of interpretation, but more with the derivation of abstruse, mostly Greek-derived vocabulary from word lists commonly known as 'hermeneumata'.[14] Lexically, this continuum of styles is indeed marked by a predilection for Grecisms, coinages, archaisms, gratuitous diminutives and unusual polysyllables. Prose texts by these authors – Oda's preface to Frithegod's *Breviloquium* and B.'s preface to the *Vita S. Dunstani* are prime examples – owe something to a renewed pedagogical vogue for the works of Aldhelm, though the extended sentences of these later texts owe much of their complexity to sometimes almost impossibly clotted syntax, rather than to the more characteristically Aldhelmian extension of relatively straightforward grammatical structures by endless proliferation of parallel phrases.

But the label 'hermeneutic' risks overemphasizing the alleged difficulty, even the virtual unintelligibility, of these texts, as well as eliding stylistic and rhetorical distinctions that might allow one to think through their more specific socio-rhetorical positioning. Frithegod's *Breviloquium*, for example, has been adduced as the single most difficult text of the period,[15] and its lexical excesses garnered in the early twelfth century the censure of William of Malmesbury, but the poem hardly lives up to its reputation for general incomprehensibility – particularly because it offers a section-by-section

13 Lapidge, 'B. and the *Vita S. Dunstani*', p. 263.
14 Lapidge, 'Hermeneutic Style', p. 67, note 2.
15 Lapidge, 'Frankish Scholar', p. 90.

versification of a much better-known and far more accessible prose account of the saint, the eighth-century Life by Stephen of Ripon (alias Eddius Stephanus), in relation to which it functions as an *opus geminatum* – that is, a verse work twinned to a prose counterpart, a genre with a long pedigree grounded in the eighth-century efflorescence of Anglo-Latin (and also represented among the tenth-century texts by Wulfstan's versification of Lantfred's prose).[16] Its deployment of unusual vocabulary suggests the consolidation of a literary community around special learning that defines the group, but without approaching the impossible pedantry of, for example, the third book of Abbo of St-Germain's *De bello Parisiacae urbis*, which can only serve to shut out any readership beyond the dubiously charmed circle of its own schoolroom. Nor does the prose of these texts suggest a uniform rhetorical strategy. B.'s preface to the Life of Dunstan, as difficult as any Anglo-Latin writing of the period, is indeed a self-conscious set-piece not only displaying, but explicitly focused upon, the stylistic ingenuity of its author; but the Latin of the Life as a whole descends to a plausible approximation of hagiographic *sermo humilis*, its 'hermeneutic' ornaments by comparison a pale reminder of the prologue's excesses.

The even more mainstream stylistics of Wulfstan the Cantor's *Narratio metrica de S. Swithuno* rise to an easy elegance fully accessible to a readership steeped in the tradition of earlier biblical and hagiographical versification. The poem begins with an extended tripartite prologue, with sections addressed to Æthelwold's successor Bishop Ælfheah and the Winchester monks before going on to a review of salvation history that serves as a *praefatio stricta* to the account of Swithun's translation and his curative miracles. The section addressing Ælfheah, written in elegiac couplets in contrast to the hexameters of the remainder of the work, describes the labyrinthine complexity of Æthelwold's renovation programme at the Old Minster and the banquet with which he celebrated the completion of his work; it continues with further praise for the architectural complexity of the new eastern crypts, reminiscent of the work of Daedalus, that can only confuse outsiders, and the deafening power of the church's organ, along with an effusive description of the church tower; it closes with a catalogue of bishops in attendance at the dedication and a roster of saints now interred there.

The lexical, grammatical and rhetorical strategies of these texts share in common the definition of the literary community by elite competencies that

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16 Wieland, '*Geminus stilus*'.

might well preclude the full participation of a wider educated public – and so, perhaps, serve to underline the unique claim of reformed Benedictine foundations to the cultural capital of the West Saxon realm.[17] We might read Wulfstan's praise for the exclusionary artifice of Winchester's ecclesiastical architecture in analogy to this recondite, group-defining textual sensibility. That Ælfric of Eynsham would stand, in the clarity and simplicity of his Latin prose, as tenth-century England's exception to these trends, is of a piece with his overriding concern as a vernacular homilist and translator not for the consolidation of Benedictine prestige but for the creation of a broader textual community of practical interpretive competency.

Vernacular experience and the appropriation of Latinity: Æthelweard's Chronicle

One remarkable lay production survives from the interface between this Benedictine literary culture and the secular elite: the Chronicle of Æthelweard.[18] Between 973 and 998, Æthelweard's signature as ealdorman appears on a number of charters, including one of 997 that styles him specifically 'Occidentalium prouinciarum dux' [ealdorman of the western provinces].[19] He probably died soon after his signature disappears from surviving charters. He and his son Æthelmær, who succeeded him in his office, are best known to students of vernacular literature as patrons of Ælfric and founders of the homilist's monasteries of Cerne and Eynsham.[20] The Chronicle, like Asser's text, has since the Cotton fire of 1731 survived only in modern editions.

We have no reason to doubt Æthelweard's declaration that he writes in response to a distant cousin's request for information about their shared ancestry. Matilda, a descendant of Alfred born in 949, served as abbess of Essen from around 971 to 1011; Æthelweard himself traced his lineage to Alfred's elder brother Æthelræd. Essen, an Ottonian imperial foundation, housed a community of aristocratic women that, like the more prominent congregations of Gandersheim and Quedlinburg, preserved dynastic genealogy and historiography with that synthesis of piety and reverence for

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17 Tyler makes much the same point in 'From Old English to Old French', p. 168.
18 On Æthelweard's extensive connections with contemporary Benedictine culture, see Cubitt, 'Ælfric's Lay Patrons'; and Gretsch, 'Ælfric, Language and Winchester'.
19 Campbell, 'Introduction' to Æthelweard, *Chronicle*, p. xv.
20 *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

imperial authority upon which Otto I and his successors relied. Æthelweard wrote between 978 and 988, and probably shortly after 982.[21]

The Chronicle extends from the creation of the world to the death of King Edgar in 975 in four books, of which the second opens with the arrival of Augustine in Kent, and the fourth and longest with the succession of Alfred's elder brothers to the throne of Wessex. Each begins with a short prologue to Matilda, whom Æthelweard also addresses directly in an extended passage midway through Book IV. Although much of the work translates the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in a form close to that of the surviving A-text,[22] parts of Books I and II draw on Bede, while a substantial portion of Book IV offers an independent account of events from 893 up to the death of Eadmund. More telling are Æthelweard's departures of arrangement, style and content from his source texts. He specifies dates in relation to previously mentioned events, albeit sometimes confusingly, in contrast with the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's paratactic sequence of discrete annual entries. The division into books bounded by events of signal historical importance likewise suggests an ambition to produce a more synthetically integrated account, aligning the text more closely with Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, but also with a more nearly contemporary continental chronicle surely known to Æthelweard's dedicatee, and presumably to Æthelweard himself, namely Widukind of Corvey's *Res gestae Saxonicae*, dedicated to Matilda's identically named cousin, who served as abbess of Quedlinburg. Elizabeth van Houts argues that Æthelweard's structure alludes to and emulates Widukind – and perhaps points to Matilda's competition as well, in requesting the Chronicle from her kinsman, with the textually enhanced prestige of a more illustrious rival house.[23]

Many readers have taken Æthelweard's strikingly eccentric Latin to task, beginning with William of Malmesbury, who delivered his curt stylistic repudiation some 150 years later in the prologue to the *Gesta regum Anglorum*. Æthelweard shares his Benedictine contemporaries' love for abstruse vocabulary drawn from word lists to which he had direct access. Alistair Campbell and others have cited his more elaborately constructed sentences, with their precious circumlocutions and alliterative patterns, as evidence of the influence of Aldhelm, for whom Æthelweard explicitly declares his admiration.[24] Yet even his most elaborate sentences hardly approach Aldhelm's stylistic extravagancies (on which see Chapter 5 above).

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21 Van Houts, 'Women and the Writing of History', p. 65.
22 Campbell, 'Introduction' to Æthelweard, *Chronicle*, pp. xxiv–xxix.
23 Van Houts, 'Women and the Writing of History', p. 61.
24 Æthelweard, *Chronicle*, p. 21.

In contrast to Aldhelm's recherché synonyms deployed in impossibly multi-plied parallel phrases, difficulty in Æthelweard derives mostly from wilfully mannered word order: prepositions almost regularly follow their objects; adjectives and larger modifying constructions are radically displaced; com-pound words are split and their components arbitrarily rearranged within the clause. Such peculiarities often suggest an exaggerated emulation of Latin verse style: the displacement of modifiers recalls the pattern of the so-called 'Golden Line', in which two noun–adjective pairs are distributed on either side of a verb;[25] the splitting of compounds extrapolates from the practice of tmesis as deployed in classical verse. We also see Æthelweard's debt to verse style in the Virgilian collocations and cadences that punctuate his narrative. More ostentatiously, Æthelweard once (in 1.4) quotes Lucan directly, with explicit attribution.

Michael Winterbottom demonstrated over forty years ago that Æthelweard's outlandishness stems not from mere linguistic deficiency but rather reflects his ambitions towards a highly distinctive historiographical style. The obvious anomalies of his usage seldom suggest naively straightfor-ward calques on idiomatic Old English grammatical constructions. Departures from the detailed sense of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle identified by the text's most recent editor as 'errors'[26] are not slips of a native speaker translating into a language he knew imperfectly, but free interpretations of the implications of the Old English, particularly in the long entry for 755 with its internecine tale of Cynewulf and Cyneheard. Nor do style and grammar remain consistent throughout the text. In the last and longest of the Chronicle's four books, in which Æthelweard departs most substantially from identifiable surviving sources, and in which he treats events most obviously relevant to the family history he shares with his dedicatee, his heightened straining after linguistic originality often carries with it a heightened obscurity.

Æthelweard's version of Gregory the Great's encounter with the English youths at the opening of his second book encapsulates some of these aspects of his Latinity but offers a counterweight to characterizations that either stress his imperfect mastery of linguistic mechanics or suggest an impossibly man-nered style throughout the work. The chapter begins with one of Æthelweard's more elaborate sentences:

> Sicuti diuina solet clementer prouidentia ab aeterno cuncta prospiciens non
> necessitate regere sed potenti intuitu, ipsaque immobilis semper ac uerbo suo

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25 Winterbottom, 'Style of Æthelweard', pp. 114–15.
26 Campbell, 'Introduction' to Æthelweard, *Chronicle*, pp. xxi–xxxii.

ex diuerso elementa disponens, hominumque genus ad ueritatis agnitionem uenire per mortem unigeniti filii sui, cuius sanguine quadrifida mundi spatia liberantur, nunc per seruum suum illustrat tenebras occidentalium in oras.

[Just as divine providence, foreseeing all things, is mercifully accustomed to governing not by necessity but by its puissant gaze and, though itself forever unmoving, variously disposes the elements by its word – and disposes too that the human race should come to recognition of the truth through the death of the only-begotten son, by whose blood the four corners of the world are set free – now through its servant that providence brings light to the darkness in the territories of the western peoples.][27]

Such a sentence has been called 'Aldhelmian' in its elaboration,[28] and to be sure it shares several traits with the earlier prose stylist (more evident in the original than in translation): its fondness for alliteration, its multiplication of modifying phrases around a syntactically straightforward core, and its circum-locutions (e.g., 'the four corners of the world' rather than just 'the world'). But simultaneously, it suggests a Boethian understanding of the relation of divine providence to historical vicissitude that anticipates Æthelweard's summary praise of Alfred in the notice of his death in Book IV, with its specifically declared admiration for Alfred's translation of the *Consolation of Philosophy*. Further, in its own context, the sentence functions as a kind of prologue in miniature to the hagiographic episode that follows, whose stylistic register drops immediately thereafter to a version of the episode so efficiently compact that it arguably presupposes the reader's prior familiarity with Bede's canon-ical version of the anecdote, to which it immediately invites comparison. (It is perhaps not coincidental that Bede's account stands in the same place in his own work, viz., the opening chapter of the second book.) In place of Bede's entire scene of Gregory's encounter with English slave boys in the market-place and his cross-linguistic puns on the proper names of their race, their country and their king, Æthelweard offers a single sentence representing the English as visiting adults rather than as underage chattels and sets the stage for a brisk dialogue with the newcomers themselves, whom Gregory sub-sequently baptizes. Very little in this short chapter suggests anything but full control of ordinary Latin syntax as received in the late tenth century, and its lexicon remains entirely straightforward, while some relatively gentle transpositions of more predictable word order might suggest a desire to stake out a claim to an originality of diction matching the originality of content with

27 Æthelweard, *Chronicle*, p. 16.
28 Campbell, 'Introduction', *ibid.*, pp. xlix–l.

which Æthelweard here supplants for his own purposes Bede's canonical narrative. Yet to be undertaken is a thorough socio-stylistic analysis of Æthelweard that assumes the intentionality of his shifts of register and analyses how they situate the text in relation both to its continental narratee and to an English readership likely to know his source texts and to judge for themselves his departures of content.

Diglossic encyclopaedism: Byrhtferth of Ramsey

The more ubiquitous wave of esoteric Benedictine Latinities culminates in the varied and ambitious output of Byrhtferth of Ramsey, whose distinctive style has been carefully described and his canon meticulously reconstructed by his most important modern student.[29] To judge from the numerous debts his works show to Abbo of Fleury, Byrhtferth's intellectual growth was profoundly enabled and shaped by the great continental scholar's two-year stay at Ramsey and the extensive literary resources he brought with him to its library. Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion*, which includes an internal reference pinpointed to February 1011,[30] consists largely of an explanation of the computus – that is, the body of chronological and mathematical lore necessary for the accurate calculation of the date of Easter – but proceeds through a catalogue of grammatical and rhetorical topics and ends with a treatise on numerology. Byrhtferth also wrote, Michael Lapidge has shown on stylistic grounds,[31] a history of English kings up to the year 887, completed some time after 991 and incorporated over a century later by Symeon of Durham into his *Historia regum*. Byrhtferth's history subsumes an originally independent hagiographical work, a Passion of Sts Æthelberht and Æthelræd (whose probable date suggests the *terminus a quo* for the work as a whole). Byrhtferth produced two further saints' Lives, a *vita* of his house's founder Oswald, written between 997 and 1002, and a *vita* of Ecgwin, the founder of Evesham. This last work, addressed to the community of Evesham (Part IV, chap. 12), attests to the wider literary prestige Byrhtferth had accrued by the time of its composition, and he may plausibly have written it in thanks for hospitality during a stay at Evesham following Ramsey's nearly disastrous reversal of fortunes with Cnut's defeat of Edmund Ironside in 1016.[32] All these works are

29 Lapidge, 'Introduction' to Byrhtferth, *Lives*, pp. xxx–lxv.
30 *Ibid.*, p. xxxii.
31 Lapidge, 'Byrhtferth of Ramsey'.
32 Lapidge, 'Introduction' to Byrhtferth, *Lives*, p. xxix.

marked by a pervasive fascination with numerology, by recondite vocabulary, and by distinctive tics of syntax.

In contradistinction to many texts of the monastic revival that might be described with potentially misleading generality as 'hermeneutic', one hall-mark of Byrhtferth's works is their radically composite construction. The *Enchiridion* displays not only egregiously disparate subject matter but an eccentric and inconsistently applied bilingualism that perhaps reflects a need to reach an audience of secular priests lacking competence in Latin as well as a more learned monastic readership. (Byrhtferth suggests as much at the end of his Latin prologue to the last section of Part I.) At a number of junctures, he declares that a section next following in English will recapitulate the Latin. Yet to take the functionalism of Byrhtferth's explanation at face value begs several questions. Why is the presentation of sections in alternating languages so inconsistent throughout the work? What ought the reader to make of the clear and substantive, if generally brief, departures of the English from the Latin? And far more basically, why did Byrhtferth not simply produce a continuous translation? The unmarked shifting back and forth between languages (in the most complete manuscript, a copy of the mid-eleventh century, as in the standard critical edition) would by no means facilitate access to the text for a putatively monolingual vernacular reader. The text, rather, drives home a radical interpenetration of Latin and vernacular culture utterly foreign to the studiously exclusionary elitism of the texts of Frithegod, Lantfred, Wulfstan of Winchester and B.

The Life of Ecgwin carries Byrhtferth's anthologizing compositional habits to their apogee. A dearth of available biographical sources must have lent particular impetus to his approach,[33] but Byrhtferth's other works suggest his predisposition to such a strategy. After a prologue reminiscent, in its abstruse vocabulary, clotted syntax and allusive circumlocutions, of earlier hagiographical display pieces like Oda's prefatory letter to Frithegod's *Breviloquium* and B.'s prologue to the life of Dunstan, Byrhtferth announces a quadripartite structure treating respectively the saint's infancy, youth, maturity and old age. Into the first of these, Byrhtferth shoehorns a brief precis of the descent of apostolic succession, a notice of Ecgwin's feast day, a perfunctory account of the saint's birth from royal stock, his baptism and early education, extensive quotation of Bede's metrical poem *De die iudicii* under the guise of a homily preached by Ecgwin, and an entirely tangential reference to a letter of Pope Boniface to King Eadbald of Kent on the subject of priestly concubinage, along

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33 Lapidge, 'Byrhtferth and the Vita S. Ecgwini'.

with the missive's salutation and final sentence. But it is in Parts II and IV of the work that Byrthferth departs most spectacularly from the narrative convention, nearly ubiquitous in hagiography, of a more or less passive reportage of authoritatively transmitted information on the saint's life. Part II offers an extensive and more or less blatantly fictive account of the foundation of Evesham narrated in the first person from Ecgwin's own point of view, whose fictionality is foregrounded by Byrhtferth's ostentatiously artificial apostrophe urging the saint to come forth and speak in his own voice. Byrhtferth sets into this framework a topos of foundation narratives found variously in texts of the tenth through twelfth centuries, often though not exclusively of Celtic provenance, but also clearly evoking the prophecy of the foundation of Alba Longa in the *Aeneid*, VIII.36–65: namely, the identification of a divinely chosen site by the recovery of a lost sow, usually pregnant, pursued by its keeper to a remote wild location where the animal has given birth, and often marked as well by the appearance of a holy feminine personage.[34] Remarkably, Byrhtferth suspends the usual hagiographical tone of the narration during his initial presentation, reserving the application of a reassuringly Christian generic framework to an aside delivered by the saint himself: 'His perspectis cogitaui tacitus quod sancta Dei genetrix uirgo perpetua Maria potuisset esse quam cernebam' [Having seen all this, I silently considered that the one I was looking at might have been the ever-virgin Mary, mother of God]. Through Byrhtferth's ostentatious foregrounding of the fictionality of Ecgwin's first-person narrative, he suggests instead that the saint is most meaningfully present not as a character, but as an actively imposed hermeneutic principle that assimilates diverse material to a hagiographic interpretation: the saint, in effect, becomes the warrant for the anthologizing practice of rhetorical *inventio* instantiated by the text itself. Much as the saint himself, having arrived at his conjecture that the mysterious woman whom he sees in the place revealed to him is (or, more strictly, 'might be') the Virgin Mary, 'purges' the spot of any impure associations it might have, so the text incorporates the narrative by purifying it of any suspect secular associations that might accrue to it outside the hagiographical context into which it is here incorporated.

In Part IV, Byrhtferth similarly foregrounds the fictional narrativity of his invention, prefacing his account of Ecgwin's death with a freely constructed allegory of the saint's singlehanded assault on Babylon, here described schematically as the fortress of sin. Such gestures serve to construct textual

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34 Jankulak, 'Alba Longa'.

authority by metacritical emphasis on the process of selection and anthologization in ways that recall Asser's Life of Alfred, a text Byrhtferth certainly knew, as he drew on it for his history of West Saxon kings in the fourth section of the *Historia regum*.[35] (Precisely such a metacritical awareness of the nature of fictionality in narrative, and in historical narrative in particular, will continue to preoccupy the relatively few writers who bridge the divide between the beginning of the eleventh century and the great resurgence of Anglo-Latin writing that begins in the late 1060s, and in particular the anonymous author of the *Encomium Emmae reginae*.)

Multilingual accommodation in the Anglo-Latin hagiography of the Norman transition: Osbern and Goscelin

Compared to the surviving archive of the later tenth and early eleventh centuries, few Anglo-Latin texts survive from the half century following the end of Byrhtferth's career; but the texts that do survive witness to an extension of Byrhtferth's exuberantly bilingual *habitus* into the radically polyglot milieu of the Anglo-Danish court, where Old English, Old Norse and Old French were mediated by Latin as a language which, belonging uniquely to none, could function as a lingua franca serviceable to all. Elizabeth Tyler, in two signal reassessments of the *Emmae reginae*, which was written between 1040 and 1042 in Flanders by a continental author possibly originating at the abbey of St-Bertin, addresses the function of Latinity as an ethnically neutral shared space within this milieu and shows how the profound influence of the *Aeneid* on the text foregrounds the author's implicit understanding of the rhetorical fictionality of historical narrative.[36] This same milieu is noteworthy for extending the lay investment in the Latinity of secular historiography that began in Asser, continued in Æthelweard, and will culminate in the *Vita Ædwardi regis* on the eve of the Norman Conquest.[37] (The continuity of female patronage – by Matilda of Essen, Emma and, in the case of the latter text, by Edward the Confessor's queen Edith – in this tradition of secular lay Latinity is also noteworthy. One might look forward here as well to the patronage by two further Matildas – the queen of Henry I and an empress – of the great historiographical enterprise with which this present essay will close, the *Historia regum Anglorum* of William of Malmesbury.)

35 Lapidge, 'Introduction' to Byrhtferth, *Lives*, pp. xxxix–xlii.
36 Tyler, 'Fictions of Family', and 'Talking About History'.
37 Tyler, 'From Old English to Old French', pp. 172–3.

Yet monastic preoccupations once again dominate a powerful resurgence of Latin writing in the years after 1066, which constitutes a direct response to the widely perceived jeopardy in which English cultural identity and linguistic prestige came very soon to stand.[38] Hagiographical writing dominates this new wave, either reducing the biographies of native saints to formal Latin *vitae* for the first time (as in the cases of Ælfheah, Augustine of Canterbury and Birinus of Winchester, among others) or rewriting texts of earlier provenance (as in the cases of Dunstan and Ecgwin). In the generation immediately after the Conquest, the work of Goscelin holds pride of place in range and importance. Goscelin, originally a monk of St-Bertin in Flanders – a house that was as rich a source of Anglo-Latin writers and their inspiration in the eleventh century as Fleury had been in the tenth – first arrived in England well before the Conquest under the patronage of Bishop Herman of Sherborne, dispatched hagiographical commissions for various English monastic houses beginning some years after the Conquest, including Wilton, Ramsey and Ely, and eventually settled at St Augustine's, Canterbury by the end of the 1080s, where he served as precentor.[39] At the rival priory of Canterbury Cathedral, and active there some years before Goscelin's Canterbury period – indeed, from very shortly after the Conquest, and in the first years of Lanfranc's tenure as archbishop – Osbern produced a new life of Dunstan, along with a collection of that saint's miracles; a life of Æflheah or Elphege, a successor of Dunstan as archbishop of Canterbury slain by the Danes in 1012; and an account of the latter's translation from his initial resting place in London back to Canterbury under the sponsorship of Cnut.

Osbern's texts are striking for the deft rhetorical pragmatics of his response to the cathedral community's cultural bifurcation upon the arrival of Norman monks and the Conqueror's new appointment as prelate. There is no evidence that the cult of Dunstan was ever in serious jeopardy at Canterbury under Archbishop Lanfranc, central as it was to the identity and prestige of the new archbishop's see,[40] but linguistic fragmentation and the unfamiliarity to Norman newcomers of the circumstances of the saint's life, deeply implicated as those circumstances were in the tenth-century history of the West Saxon royal line, must have pointed up continuously the rifts in social identification within the community. In the case of Ælfheah, a saint whose veneration had produced no previous *vita* in the half-century since his death, a tenuous claim to the status of martyr seems at one point to have elicited Lanfranc's openly

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38 Townsend, 'Anglo-Latin Hagiography'; Pfaff, 'Lanfranc's Supposed Purge'.
39 Sharpe, 'Goscelin's St Augustine'.
40 Pfaff, 'Lanfranc's Supposed Purge'.

expressed scepticism, and it is hard to imagine other newly arrived Norman members of the community being less equivocal in their reactions to the cult.[41] Most pointedly in the prologues of his texts, but throughout their length, Osbern recasts potential Norman alienation from both English language and local ecclesiastical usages as stylistic alienation from insufficiently elegant and polished earlier texts, in order to suture the fragmentation of his most immediate audience into a unity consolidated around canons of literary taste.

In the prologue to his Life of Dunstan, Osbern justifies his rewriting of the *vita* by suggesting that the surviving texts err respectively in either of two directions:

> alii etsi satis eleganter non tamen satis diligenter, sed quantum ad nocturnum festivitatis officium satis esse judicavere, sermocinandi ad populum modo scripsere. Alii autem dum nimis diligenter, quemadmodum quaeque res acta sit explicare conarentur, elegantiam perdiderunt, atque in illud dicendi genus quod suffultum Romanae princeps eloquentiae vocat, indicerunt, quod facilius taedium legentibus quam aliquod audientibus emolumentum gignere consuevit.

> [Some wrote in a popular homiletic mode – though elegantly enough, yet not with enough industry, but only in so far as they judged sufficient for the night office of the feast. Others, while they wrote with excessive industry, to the extent that they attempted to expound everything that took place, lost all elegance and fell into the style that the prince of Roman eloquence called 'propped up' – a style that more easily begets boredom in one's readers than it offers any profit to the audience.][42]

Osbern's criticisms refer clearly in the first instance to Adelard's early eleventh-century life, arranged for liturgical use in the office for Dunstan's feast, and to B. in the second. In thus appealing against the latter to Ciceronian rhetorical dictates, Osbern aligns himself with his putative audience on the side of a classicizing standard of diction, while at the same time assuming the legitimacy of his material as a given. But a third class of writings, those who now urge him to write tell him, were once available, which succeeded in combining fullness of treatment with decorous style. This third group was lost in the recent Christ Church fire of 1067, save that they survive as translations into English; his patrons now urge him to render them once more into Latin. There is good reason to believe that a vernacular Life of Dunstan in fact

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41 Eadmer, *Life of St Anselm*, pp. 50–4.
42 Osbern, *Vita sancti Dunstani*, pp. 69–70.

existed, drawn on both by Osbern and after him by William of Malmesbury for details of the saint's life not mentioned in B.[43] But more to the point, by so constructing his appeal to vernacular writings, Osbern uncontentiously suggests that both *materia* and *elocutio* as rhetorical categories are capable of transcending the linguistic divide between Latin and a vernacular familiar only to one portion of his contemporary Canterbury audience.

Osbern similarly conflates interlinguistic relations with questions of appropriate stylistics in the prologue to his life of Ælfheah, where in the absence of an earlier text he founds the authority of his own in the first instance on the testimony of eye-witnesses, the content of which he reproduces while eschewing their actual words, 'since', he says, 'dicendi primitias barbaricis appellationibus decolorare nolo' [I do not wish to sully my speech from the outset with barbaric vocabulary]. At the same time, he asserts, 'Aliqua tamen de his rebus non incommode scripta inveni: quorum sententias exinde assumptas, praesenti scripturae congruo ordine inserenda judicavi' [I have, however, found some things not unattractively written about these matters; I have judged some sentences drawn from these suitable for insertion in due order in the present work]. He thus recasts the transition from the questionable orality of a native vernacular English tradition to a formally composed *vita* as essentially a matter of rhetorical execution – a reframing made all the more urgent, and fraught with all the more possibility of scepticism on the part of his audience, given Lanfranc's application of newly rigorous literate standards of evaluation to English ecclesiastical life and thought.[44] The capstone of this strategy comes at the end of the prologue with Osbern's reference to Lanfranc's prior commission of musical compositions in honour of Ælfheah. With Lanfranc's own reservations about the legitimacy of the cult securely resolved, in this final gesture of authorization Lanfranc is himself tellingly cast as 'invictissimo totius Latinitatis magistro' [the unsurpassed master of all Latinity].

Goscelin's far broader output reflects his itinerant career as a 'professional hagiographer', to borrow Antonia Gransden's phrase.[45] We can ascribe the contrast between the pragmatics of his Latin style and Osbern's at least in part to the breadth of perspective and the flexibly engaged antiquarian interests of a writer exposed to the local traditions and concerns of a number of monastic communities over the course of his career. Where Osbern is at pains to deflect

43 Winterbottom and Thompson, 'Introduction' to William of Malmesbury, *Saints' Lives*, pp. xviii–xix.
44 Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, pp. 295–309.
45 Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p. 107.

potential objections to the legitimacy of his community's traditions in the face of fresh, even raw, cultural bifurcations, Goscelin evinces a researcher's less visceral investment and acknowledges frankly that his texts may well hold limited interest beyond the communities for which he produces them. His life of St Mildrith, a royal abbess of the early eighth century in Minster-in-Thanet, whose relics were translated to St Augustine's in 1035, begins with five chapters on the saint's genealogy, local traditions, and the establishment of privileges extended to her community, all matters of central local concern but of documentary and historiographical rather than strictly hagiographical interest. His massive *Historia maior sancti Augustini*, the cornerstone of his entire dossier of texts written for St Augustine's, incorporates an extensive range of documentary sources drawn directly from Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*. Goscelin's *Historia minor* expressly provides an alternative compendium for those outside the house possibly less tolerant of detail than readers within the community.

Nowhere does Goscelin display a rhetoric aimed to suture rifts within the text's immediate readership comparable to the pragmatics of Osbern's texts. This is particularly surprising in the case of the lives written at St Augustine's, a community torn apart by dissension and eventually dispersed by Lanfranc and reconstituted anew between 1087 and 1089, in the wake of the imposition of a new abbot and violent reactions on the part of monks and townsfolk.[46] Goscelin's entire production for the abbey appears in two comprehensive early manuscripts as a unified cycle clearly focused on a great translation ceremony conducted in 1091, in which Augustine, Mildrith and the other lesser saints of the house were all installed in the newly rebuilt abbey church. In addition to his Life of the saint and his account of her translation to Canterbury under Cnut, Goscelin produced a treatise refuting a claim by the newly founded rival house of St Gregory's to possess the relics.[47] Here, as elsewhere, Goscelin studiously portrays the community for which he writes as unproblematically unified, while he represents those outside its boundaries, if not as simply unconcerned with local matters, then as an externalized foe. If his *Libellus contra usurpatores* written in refutation of St Gregory's claim is an extensive free-standing example of his abjection of disunity, we find another in a sequence of misogynist vengeance miracles that figure prominently in the opening section of his life of Augustine in both its longer and shorter versions[48] – this latter all the more remarkable in light of Goscelin's profound

46 Sharpe, 'Goscelin's St Augustine'; Townsend, 'Omissions'.
47 Goscelin, *Liber contra inanes S. uirginis Mildrethae usurpatores*.
48 Townsend, 'Omissions'.

and appreciative engagement with gynocentric models of sanctity in the very considerable portion of his output that treats the lives of female royal saints, which he produced under the patronage of aristocratic women's communities at Ely, Barking and Wilton – the latter a house where he formed a deep affective relationship with a recluse for whom he wrote a treatise of anchoritic counsel, the *Liber Confortatorius*.[49]

William of Malmesbury and the consolidation of hybrid literary identities

Osbern and Goscelin figure prominently among a roster of contemporary hagiographers which includes as well Folcard, the Flemish author of the *Vita Ædwardi regis*, St Anselm's disciple and biographer Eadmer, Dominic of Evesham and the anonymous authors of a number of other texts.[50] Aspects of Osbern's concern for explicit evaluation of his sources and predecessors, as well as his stylistic assessments and comparisons in support of his own authority, anticipate the preoccupations of the most important Latin stylist of the early twelfth century, William of Malmesbury (born *c.* 1095), who in turn refers explicitly to both Osbern and Goscelin with markedly appreciative attention. The emergence of the constellation of Anglo-Norman Latinities as an instrumental response to cultural dislocation and hybridity culminates in William, the offspring of mixed Norman and Anglo-Saxon parentage and a Benedictine monk from his youth. His prodigious output includes the first comprehensive history of England since Bede, divided between his secular account, the *Gesta regum Anglorum*, written at the behest of Queen Matilda and subsequently presented to her daughter, the Empress Matilda, and his ecclesiastical *Gesta pontificum Anglorum*. William undertook repeated revisions of both these works, which consequently survive in multiple versions; the former is continued by his *Historia novella*, which breaks off in the presumed year of his death, 1143.

The most thorough and meticulous of his modern students speaks at length of William's personal detachment from worldly ambitions.[51] It is true that he is reticent in the extreme about the details of his own biography, that he refused the abbacy of Malmesbury, and that virtually no direct contemporary refer-

49 Goscelin, *Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, and 'Liber Confortatorius of Goscelin'; Wilmart, 'Eve et Goscelin'.
50 Gransden, *Historical Writing*, chap. 7.
51 R. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, p. 3.

ence to him survives in other sources. But to conclude from this reticence a disengagement from the negotiations of his cultural moment would be to overextend, and the circumstances of William's career would hardly bear out such a conclusion. Despite William's Benedictine context, he writes on a queen's commission and delivers his finished work to an empress struggling for control of England during the civil war after the death of Henry I. He is known to have conducted an extensive and protracted tour of English monastic houses in the course of his research for this commission.

Such travels resulted in particularly close contact with two of his day's most influential ecclesiastical communities, each embroiled in a struggle to consolidate its claims: Worcester, for which he wrote a life of St Wulfstan in three books; and Glastonbury, where he spent a protracted period and was enrolled as a *confrater* of the community, and for which he wrote an ambitious life of Dunstan as well as now-fragmentary lives of Patrick, Benignus and Indract. His work for the latter community also included a treatise on the antiquity of the church of Glastonbury. His meticulous research and deliberate cultivation of an elegant, sophisticated and classically inspired Latin prose style, in these hagiographical works as in his histories, bespeak not a detachment from the issues of his day but his response and his own intervention.

Nor does William simply cultivate his distinctive style, with its deliberate avoidance of formula, its reaching after vividly – and occasionally cryptically – original phrasing, and its sometimes ironic, wry detachment from the motivations of his subjects. He is at pains to define explicitly his relation to his source texts and other predecessors, not only to adjudicate their relative reliability, but in deliberate reflection on their stylistic merits and deficiencies. In the prologue to Book I of the *Gesta regum*, he declares for the first of many times his debt to Bede, citing as well the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the work of Eadmer. He adduces Æthelweard as a translator of the Chronicle into Latin only to deliver a stylistic dismissal of his work all the more damning for its brevity. Amidst his enthusiastic praise of Aldhelm's literary attainments he concedes that the convoluted style of his works is not to everyone's taste and goes on to generalize about national stylistic predilections as a reflection of respective national characters.[52] He expresses his appreciation of the learning and works of Goscelin with the highest praise, describing his peripatetic career as hagiographer in terms that can hardly evade comparison with William's own itinerant search for sources (chap. 343). His praise for Osbern's 'Roman

52 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, vol. I, p. 46.

elegance' of style attaches specifically to the latter's Life of Dunstan (chap. 149). In these and numerous other references to earlier English writers, William thus in some degree becomes de facto the first self-conscious literary historian of England.

The notion of William as a disinterested observer of contemporary culture is never more palpably challenged than in his hagiographical works. The vociferous and sustained reversal, in his Life of Dunstan, of his admiring assessment of Osbern's corresponding text – upon which he in fact draws extensively, despite his tendentious criticisms of its alleged inaccuracies – stands in service of Glastonbury's rivalry with Canterbury over primary claim to Dunstan's patronage, the most extreme expression of which was a historically fanciful claim to possess the saint's bodily relics.[53] His critique figures already in his prologue as a prime justification for his undertaking, and its disingenuousness is not limited to his accusation of Osbern's inaccuracies: Osbern further becomes a screen behind which William can dodge the question of his relation to other previous retellings of a *vita* already extensively rehearsed since B.'s initial effort – by Adelard in the early eleventh century, in a text written with a specific eye to the liturgical requirements of the saint's office, and, after Osbern, by Eadmer. At the same time, William alludes repeatedly (in the prologue to both books of his work) to a vernacular life presumably identical with that also mentioned by Osbern.

It is, however, in his Life of St Wulfstan, the one Anglo-Saxon bishop whose tenure extended several decades beyond the coming of the Normans, that William fully thematizes his relation to a lost vernacular antecedent. There he declares himself, in his introductory letter to the community of Worcester, to be adapting a vernacular Life written very early in the twelfth century by Coleman, a monk of Worcester whose literary activity also included marginal annotation in a number of Worcester manuscripts.[54] William there notably casts his debt as one of adaptation, not of translation in the narrowest sense. He reminds his reader repeatedly through the course of the text both of his debt to Coleman as an eye-witness source for the saint's life and of the points at which he has chosen in some aspect of his treatment to depart from Coleman's presentation. In the prologue to his second book, for example, William once more recasts a supersession of vernacular by Latin as a replacement of excessive by moderate style in consonance with accepted rhetorical

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53 Winterbottom and Thomson, 'Introduction' to William of Malmesbury, *Saints' Lives*, pp. xx–xxiii.

54 Orchard, 'Parallel Lives'.

canons of taste.[55] On the one hand, William legitimizes Coleman as source, reserving an originary integrity to an earlier English-language witness doubly unimpeachable for his personal association with the saint, and recalling the specificity of the English text to the extent that William's Latin, as a recent study has suggested, is substantially inflected by Coleman's stylistic idiosyncrasies.[56] On the other, he captures the assent of an audience some of whom would find an English text unintelligible and its emphasis on the Anglo-Saxon identity of the saint alienating. By his modification of the source, William here places even further stress on the distinction between Anglo-Saxon and Norman, calling explicit attention to the replacement of Coleman's straightforwardly biographical division between books of his text with a historiographical division at the watershed of 1066.

The partisan elements in William's hagiographical efforts on behalf of Worcester and Glastonbury stand in marked contrast to the even-handedness of his treatment of the broader current of English history, and particularly of the events leading up to and consequent upon the arrival of the Normans. William narrates earlier supersessions of peoples in Britain in such a way as to contextualize this latest transfer of power as one further step in a series of transitions – often traumatic, often brutal, but nonetheless capable of interpretive assimilation into a narrative of ultimately unruptured continuity – beginning at the outset with his treatment of the arrival of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, whom he describes as three distinct peoples and whose arrival in Britain he contextualizes as one instance of continental Germania's continuous generation and expulsion of invading hordes. The continued struggles of the early English against British resurgences, and the depredations of the Danes in the ninth and again at the turn of the eleventh century, culminating in the accession of Cnut to the throne of England, are all narrated from a vantage point of objective detachment – a detachment paradoxically facilitated by William's own mixed English-Norman identity, which for him encapsulates a supersession of the ruptures that the history of England has transcended. In this context, one can see William's overarching concern for sophisticated style not simply as a learned preference for 'correct' usage, and his fondness for the rhetorical trope of ironic detachment not as a simple decorative affectation, but as the adoption of a narrative voice capable of bridging palpable conflict and diversity of identity – a voice furthermore able to articulate deeper identity from an authoritatively metropolitan view of

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55 William of Malmesbury, *Saints' Lives*, pp. 58–61.
56 Orchard, 'Parallel Lives'.

events that stands at once inside and outside the field of subjective identification. As Michael Winterbottom translates with particular elegance, William's prologue to the *Gesta regum* declares, 'Vnde michi cum propter patriae caritatem, tum propter adhortantium auctoritatem uoluntati fuit interruptam temporum seriem sarcire et exarata barbarice Romano sale condire' [It was therefore my design, in part moved by love of my country and in part encouraged by influential friends, to mend the broken chain of our history, and give a Roman polish to the rough annals of our native speech].[57]

In this, William stands as direct heir to and expands upon Bede's analogous use of the metropolitan vantage point, and with it a strikingly 'correct' and classicizing Latin, as a means of suturing the ethnically and politically disunified field of seventh-century English history into the narrative of a single *gens Anglorum*; nor is it perhaps coincidental that in narrating once more the originary encounter of Gregory the Great with the English, William reverts from the intervening version of Æthelweard to an abbreviation of the outlines of Bede's account: once again in William, as in Bede, the English whom Gregory encounters are underage slaves to be observed rather than adult interlocutors to be engaged with directly, and the proper names of their nation, homeland and sovereign become material for etymologizing wordplay that reveals the ultimate meaning and teleological fulfilment of vernacular terms as reconfigured within a productively alienated and alienating acquired language of high culture. And yet, in William, as in Bede before him,[58] this metropolitan stance towards content, and with it his adoption of metropolitan standards of language and style, should not be seen as a simple cancellation of the claims of local and vernacular subjectivity. William's assertions of an English identity that in some sense remains defined in tension with Norman impositions are too numerous to admit the notion that he collapses ongoing cultural difference into an unproblematically stable synthesis. The negotiation of unstable Insular identities will continue to inform the development of Latinities in England after him – most immediately in Geoffrey of Monmouth, soon thereafter in William of Newburgh and Thomas of Monmouth, and, later in the twelfth century, in Walter Map and Gerald of Wales.

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57 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, vol. 1, p. 15.
58 Mehan and Townsend, '"Nation"' and the Gaze'.

The authority of English, 900–1150

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The well-known educational reforms instigated by King Alfred in the 890s established the cultural and intellectual value of English at a time when no other vernacular language had attained such centrally authorized validity. The impact of these reforms was immediate, inasmuch as a number of notable classical and patristic texts were translated into English, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was initiated on a formal footing, and freemen were encouraged to acquire an education in English. From the first half of the tenth century, even though the endurance of these reforms seems to have been tenuous at times, numerous English and Latin literary manuscripts and administrative documents survive, including vernacular witnesses to the works emphasized by Alfred as 'most necessary for all men to know': the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, copies of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and Orosius' *Historiae adversum paganos*.[1] By the end of the tenth century, these beginnings had flourished into a sizeable corpus of English poetry and prose such that the legacy of Alfred was assured by those who knowingly followed in his footsteps.

Authority 1: the testimony of English[2]

By the early decades of the eleventh century, so vibrant and confident was the use of English that its promise as the language of record resulted in the copying of the four major poetic codices capturing and making permanent the long history of vernacular verse, as discussed in Chapters 11 and 16 above. The writing down of a literary tradition that had previously been predominantly oral shows clearly that English as a written medium was understood by the manuscript compilers and scribes to have longevity, to

1 For these, see Ker, *Catalogue*; and Gneuss, *Handlist*.
2 The subheadings of this chapter are taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*'s various definitions for the headword 'authority'.

have weight and authority. This gravitas is confirmed by the occurrence in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle of poetry celebrating and commemorating English kings, and by the inclusion in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 201 of not just homilies, laws and ecclesiastical regulations, but of religious poetry too.[3]

The vernacular's authority thus cannot be doubted when it was used to cipher the *Logos*, the word of God, in all its glory, as in the poetry of Corpus 201. Nowhere is this sacralization of English more apparent than in the gloss to the Lindisfarne Gospels, a manuscript of such visual power that it is venerated today by scholars just as much as it must have been venerated by the monks who created and used it. London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero D. iv is datable to the last decades of the seventh or first decades of the eighth century, and is exceptionally widely known through its frequent appearance on television programmes, the reproduction of its ornamented pages on notebooks, coasters and cards, and numerous scholarly debates about its production, history and value as a cultural icon.[4] The codex contains the Gospels and Hieronymian prefaces in Latin, with beautifully decorated carpet pages and Evangelist portraits. It also testifies to the use of English in a tenth-century monastic context, a use that illustrates both the pedagogic and didactic function of English, and to the acceptance that English could appear in the closest proximity to Holy Scripture and as a viable linguistic alternative to Latin.

In a colophon added to blank space at the end of the Gospel of St John at folio 259[r], Aldred, a priest at the community of St Cuthbert in Chester-le-Street, County Durham, reveals that it is he who wrote the Old English gloss. In a lengthy statement of thirty cramped lines, he fills the original fifteen lines left blank with an explication of how the original Gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These Latin lines, glossed in English, are followed by a statement in English and Latin testifying to the creation of the Lindisfarne Gospels itself by Eadfrith and Æthelwald, bishops of Lindisfarne, Billfrith the anchorite, and Aldred:

> Ond [ic] Aldred, presbyter indignus et misserimus – Alfredi natus, Aldredus vocor; bonæ mulieris (id est 'til wif') filius eximius loquor – mið Godes fultummæ and Sancti Cuðberhtes, hit ofergloesade on Englisc, ond hine gehamadi mið ðæm ðriim dælum: Matheus dæl, Gode ond Sancte Cuðberhti; Marcus dæl ðæm biscope; ond Lucas dæl ðæm hiorode, ond

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3 Bredehoft, *Textual Histories*; Treharne, 'Manuscript Sources'.
4 See M. Brown, *Lindisfarne Gospels*, and www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/features/lindisfarne/learning.html.

æht ora seolfres mið to inlade; ond Sancti Iohannis dæl for hine seolfne (id est 'fore his saule') ond feouer ora seolfres mið Gode ond Sancte Cuðberhti, þætte he hæbbe ondfong ðerh Godes milsæ on heofnum . . .

[And [I] Aldred, unworthy and most wretched priest – son of Alfred, I speak as the distinguished son of a good woman (that, is 'good woman') – with God's help and St Cuthbert's, glossed it above in English, and made myself at home with the three parts: the part of Matthew, for God and St Cuthbert; the part of Mark for the bishop; and the part of Luke for the monastic community, and together with eight ores of silver for his acceptance into that community; and the part of St John for himself (that is, 'for his soul') together with four ores of silver for God and St Cuthbert, so that, with God's mercy, he might be received into heaven . . .][5]

This colophon has rightly attracted significant attention from scholars,[6] since it is remarkable evidence for the creation of one of the most ornate and de luxe manuscripts to survive from Anglo-Saxon England, and – notably, since most textual evidence is from the south of the country – *northern* England at that. Of interest here, however, is the obvious authority that Aldred felt he had to intervene in a splendid and revered volume to *complete* it with an English gloss. His vernacular glosses intrude into the spacious design of the book in a quite daring act that reflects the degree of ownership felt by Aldred. His colophon, with its careful parallelism between the four Evangelists and the four creators and adorners of the Gospel book, must surely be intended not only to reveal, but consciously to counter any claims that could be made of libric vandalism. The revelation of Aldred's name, like the lists of names that survive in the Anglo-Saxon *Libri vitae* from Durham, Winchester and Thorney,[7] ensures his place in Christ's final Book of Life (Apocalypse 20:13). His close and deliberate association with St John vicariously bestows upon Aldred the Evangelist's role of spokesperson 'Who hath given testimony to the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ, what things soever he hath seen' (Apocalypse 1:3). Yet this spokesperson, Aldred, this revealer of God's word, writes in English, testifying to the unequivocal authority of the Northumbrian language, written in harmony with Latin

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5 Edited from the manuscript facsimile. Parts of the Lindisfarne Gospels, including the colophon folio, are available in an interactive format at the British Library website: www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/lindisfarne.html. The 'ic' in the first line has been erased, but is clearly visible. All translations are my own.

6 See Nees, 'Reading Aldred's Colophon'; and J. Roberts, *Guide to Scripts*, pp. 34–7, plate 5.

7 See the essays in Rollason (ed.), *Durham 'Liber vitae'*, especially Simon Keynes, '*Liber vitae* of the New Minster, Winchester' (pp. 149–64) and Jan Gerchow, 'Origins of the Durham *Liber vitae*' (pp. 45–62).

throughout the Gospels, translating for the benefit of the monks of St Cuthbert's community, the bishop and Aldred's own soul.

Such was the status of English, then, that less than a century after the firm establishment of the vernacular as a vehicle of learning and pastoral care it could be used alongside the most prestigious and authorized medium of Latin. The ease with which Aldred code-switches shows his presumably fluent level of bilingualism. This means Aldred as a member of the *literati* (those literate specifically in Latin) was quite at home with his native tongue as an official, and in this case sacralized, form of written communication. Not all scholarly monks felt the same confidence.

Authority II: authorship

Aldred, in his colophon, names himself and his achievement in glossing the Lindisfarne Gospels. With a modesty typical of medieval authors (his unworthiness and wretchedness), he is not so self-effacing as to erase his own role in disseminating Scripture to those who could not read Latin, or who wanted to access the Gospels as a grammatical exercise through the medium of English. This willingness to be accountable for the textual product became increasingly important as the medieval period progressed, but authorship (defined narrowly as someone who creates a text, a 'writere' in Old English) and the concomitant, and etymologically related, issues of *auctoritas* were already significant concerns for some writers of English by the tenth century.[8] *Auctor*, or 'author', first enters English in the later fourteenth century, but Latin *auctoritas* is a widely used term in Anglo-Saxon England denoting those source authors, who were often patristic, used in the composition of all genres of religious and instructional literature. Writers who composed in English using these heavyweight *auctores* might have perceived themselves to be simply filters of earlier, accepted written authority; certainly, taking responsibility on one's own for the dissemination of knowledge seemed fraught with difficulty to Anglo-Saxon writers. It is precisely the claim of the individual to be the owner of a text that creates the concept of the author as one who influences, teaches and propagates truth. The relationship between the author and those who read or hear the author's work is one of power, of course; moral and intellectual supremacy emanates from the author with the expectation of obedience and belief from the audience. This relationship is very evident in all the writings – both English and Latin – of three named authors in

8 Kurath and Kuhn (eds.), *Middle English Dictionary*, *s.v.* auctour.

tenth- to eleventh-century England, Byrhtferth of Ramsey (*c.* 970 to *c.* 1016), Ælfric of Eynsham (*c.* 955 to *c.* 1010), and Wulfstan I of York (d. 1023).

In late Anglo-Saxon England, these, and other writers, had King Alfred's example to follow: a monarch, and a great one at that, whose emphasis on education in the vernacular, and whose willingness to name himself as responsible, established a precedent for these writers a century or so later. Byrhtferth was a Benedictine monk of the reformed monastery of Ramsey, a wealthy institution in the fens of East Anglia, who wrote a number of historical and hagiographical works, including a *Life of St Oswald*, and the *Historia regum*, which was absorbed into Simeon of Durham's later history of the same name.[9] In *c.* 1011, by which time he was the master of the school at Ramsey, Byrhtferth compiled the *Enchiridion*, in which he shows himself to be fully aware of his authority, his role as author and teacher, and his debt to the sources he employed – the *auctores* – over one hundred of whom he quotes in his total corpus of writings.[10]

In compiling the *Enchiridion*, Byrhtferth was ultimately aiming to educate not only the young monks in his care at Ramsey's school, but also lay priests from surrounding areas, who seemed also to have their own, more junior clerics to instruct.[11] His manual, designed to explicate his complex computus (allowing the date of Easter to be determined), is a book written in both English and Latin containing computistical, arithmetical, grammatical and reference material. In his comments about the motivation behind the composition of the *Enchiridion*, Byrthferth discusses, in Latin, why he composed this work:

> Plurima pandere ignotis libet et non silere propter scientian philosophorum, sed referre non ignorantibus et sermonibus propalare quod significant hec sacra nomina . . . In hoc exiguo opera, qui exigui sumus actibus iam oportet, operante per nos Domino, ut negotium, quod cepimus stilo festinante, fructu propensiori exerceamus.

> [It is appropriate to reveal various things to the ignorant and not to fall silent because of the learning of wise men, but to explain to the ignorant and to set out in writing what these holy names signify . . . In this trivial work, it is fitting that I, who am trivial in respect of my accomplishments, should now work towards a weightier result in that matter which I undertook with a hasty pen, the Lord operating through me.][12]

9 Lapidge, in Byrhtferth, *Lives*, gives a detailed account of his life and work.
10 *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.
11 On the complexity of this audience, see Stephenson, 'Scapegoating'.
12 Byrhtferth, *Enchiridion*, pp. 14–17.

In this thoughtful passage, Byrhtferth shows how important he knows his work to be: it is revelatory and explicatory; he writes as a mouthpiece for God and for the 'learning of wise men'. Despite the essential modesty topos, this is an author who knows full well the significance of the task in hand, a task to which he assigns his name not once, but six times in the course of the *Enchiridion*.[13] As author, he is able to mediate for the unlearned, to give them access to holy mysteries through the authority of earlier revered sources, an authority he inherits and dispenses.

The role of English in this exercise is interesting and problematic. English appears to be the language used for the *illiterati*, the 'illiterate' in Latin. Generally, the English translations that follow the Latin are pared down; when Byrhtferth moves to English, it is to 'speak of this a little'.[14] He urges the 'reverend clerk' to pay close attention as a 'geornfulla scoliere' [eager pupil], an 'arwurða leorningcniht' [reverend disciple], and admits to finding the Latin computus difficult to interpret in the vernacular:

> Þas þing synt earfoðe on Englisc to secganne, ac we wyllað þurh Cristes fultum hig onwreon swa swa we betst magon and þas meregrota þam beforan lecgan þe þisra þinga gyman wyllað.

> [These things are difficult to say in English, but with Christ's help we shall reveal them as well as we can, and lay the pearls before those who wish to pay heed to these things.][15]

The implication of this is ambiguous: either the computus is so difficult that no amount of translation can make it easier; or, English is not a language sufficiently equipped to render the complexity of the computus's specialized vocabulary effectively; or, those who require such work in English are, implicitly, 'swine', before whom such pearls are reluctantly laid (Matthew 7:6). On occasion, he mixes Latin with English to expound his meaning, thus increasing the capaciousness of English to explain highly erudite matters:[16]

> *Prolemsis* hatte þæt forme, þæt ys on Lyden *anticipatio uel preocupatio uel presumptio*, þæt ys on Englisc forestæppung oððe dyrstynnys, þonne se nama byð beforan þe sceolde beon bæftan.

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13 See *ibid*., pp. xxv–xxxiv.
14 *Ibid*., p. 33.
15 *Ibid*., pp. 66–7.
16 As do other grammatical writers, of course, including Ælfric. See Menzer, 'Ælfric's Grammar'.

[The first [figure of speech] is called *prolepsis*, that is, *anticipatio*, *preocupatio* or *presumptio* in Latin and anticipation or presumption in English, when the noun comes before, but ought to come after.][17]

Even as Byrhtferth is aware of the apparent limitations of English, he is adept at proficiently manipulating the medium, and enhancing its status in the process. His authority is reinforced by his declarations of concern, and by his admonitions to the unlearned; he consciously places himself in a formative role in the education of monks and in the shaping of secular priests and clerics. He draws attention to the 'rusticity' and 'laziness' of his audience, occasionally labelling his audience as such: 'O rustic priest, I suppose you do not know what an atom is, but I will inform you about this word.'[18] His direct addresses draw the reader in, but also inform us about his perception of English: that it is quite appropriate to use it with due care as a functional tool for the unlearned and, despite his comments to the contrary, for the learned monks, who must have computistical material at their disposal. His underplaying of the significance of the vernacular is belied by his writing in it at all, which shows that the authority of English in the monastic classroom, and in ecclesiastical life more generally, was firmly established by the earlier eleventh century, and sufficiently so that the most scholarly and highly trained educators were aware of the advantages it could bring them in their mission to extend the influence and ideology of the Benedictine movement.

This so-called Benedictine Reform, initiated in the 960s with the support of King Edgar and his wife Ælfthryth, had a major impact on the monastic order of late Anglo-Saxon England, and a direct impact on the production of English.[19] Some half a century earlier, among its initial propagators, there was a keen awareness of the need to promote the movement through both Latin and English in order to maximize its success. Dunstan, Æthelwold and Oswald were all significant in establishing reformed monastic institutions throughout southern England that employed the *Regularis concordia* as the authorized and specifically English set of rules for the communal lives of monks and nuns.[20] Æthelwold also appears to have taken responsibility

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17 Byrhtferth, *Enchiridion*, pp. 162–3. This passage is also discussed by Stephenson, 'Scapegoating', p. 118.
18 Byrhtferth, *Enchiridion*, p. 111. In 'Scapegoating', Stephenson convincingly shows the rhetorical and ideological value of undermining the secular clergy in order to emphasize the abilities of the Benedictine monks.
19 On the Benedictine Reform, see, *inter alia*, J. Hill, 'Benedictine Reform'.
20 On the *Regularis concordia* and its cultural milieu, see the essays in Parsons (ed.), *Tenth-Century Studies*.

for the translation of the Rule of St Benedict into English, and this survives in six complete manuscript versions, and three fragments, datable from the later tenth century to the early thirteenth.[21] None of the surviving versions attests to Æthelwold's authorship of the English *Rule*,[22] suggesting it may have been thought of as the promulgation of a document on behalf of an entire group of interested parties. As a translation, it might also have been barely regarded as 'authorship' per se. King Edgar and Queen Ælfthryth requested the translation of the Rule into English,[23] suggesting that they were not Latinate, but this shows that there could have been no more highly valued linguistic endeavour; the English Rule was to be monarchically inspired and validated from the outset. For this achievement, Æthelwold was given the estate of Sudbourne in Suffolk, which he subsequently granted to Ely.

Still, Æthelwold, as silent author, is clear about the efficacy of the vernacular. In London, British Library, MS Cotton Faustina A. x, the twelfth-century part of the manuscript contains a version of the vernacular *Rule* that may reflect its earliest transmission as an English translation. It is followed by 'Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries', which Æthelwold is thought to have written as the preface to the *Rule*.[24] In this English preface, Æthelwold discusses his thoughts on translation: the principal point is to draw the unlearned to God irrespective of which language is used to attain that end.[25]

The impetus for translation here is clear, and is reminiscent of Byrhtferth's berating of the ignorant and rustic secular priests: the vernacular becomes the means by which 'þa ungelæreden inlendisce' [the unlearned natives] can access the essentials of spirituality. Clearly, the degree of unlearnedness is relative, since presumably someone had to be able to read the written word for the exposition to be effective. Indeed, as Stephenson has shown in relation to the monolingual and ignorant persons in Byrhtferth's audience, they would actually have required quite significant levels of knowledge to understand the vernacular text's instructions.[26] One could argue the same here; that is, those wishing to follow aspects of the Rule in their own lives must necessarily have

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21 Listed and discussed in Jayatilaka, 'Old English *Benedictine* Rule'. See also Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations*, pp. 226–60.
22 He was credited with this role by the twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis*, ii.37: see Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations*, pp. 227–33.
23 Whitelock, 'Authorship', p. 124.
24 Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations*, pp. 230–3.
25 Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *English Historical Documents*, p. 848.
26 Stephenson, 'Scapegoating'.

been educated to a certain degree to be able to participate in the strictures of this consuetudinary.

In translating the Rule into English, Æthelwold made explicit his support of the use of the vernacular to ensure that 'the true faith' was accessible to all. Even though his authorship was obscured in the surviving manuscript copies of the text, it is clear that this text emanated from the very centre of the movement that authorized English as a language of equal weight to Latin in the dissemination of Christian teachings. By the 970s, when the Benedictine movement was at its apogee, English was a national language, validated by the senior members of Church and state, and with a textual life of its own.

Authority III: influence and inspiration

Æthelwold may not have named himself as the author-translator of the preface and the English *Rule* of St Benedict, but his claims to fame were numerous, and his reputation as a Church reformer, writer and teacher assured even in his own lifetime.[27] A decade or so after his death in 984, he was canonized, and one of his students and monks at Winchester, Wulfstan the Cantor, wrote the Latin *Vita S. Æthelwoldi*, commemorating the saint's life and deeds.[28] Æthelwold's lifelong commitment to the making of English Benedictine monasticism had far-reaching consequences, and none more so than the pastoral and religious work he inspired in his followers.

Wulfstan the Cantor was not the only author of a laudatory life of St Æthelwold, for another student of Æthelwold's also undertook this devotional task: Ælfric, monk of Cerne Abbas (*c.* 987), abbot of Eynsham (1005), homilist, hagiographer, grammarian and peerless English scholar. In his Latin preface to the First Series of *Catholic Homilies*,[29] written while he was a monk at Cerne Abbas, Ælfric's debt and allegiance to Æthelwold is apparent from the way in which he identifies himself and lays out his scholarly agenda:

> Ego Ælfricus, alumnus Æðelwoldi, benevoli et venerabili presulis, salutem exopto domno archiepiscopo Sigerico in Domino. Licet temere vel presump-tuose, tamen transtulimus hunc codicem ex libris Latinorum, scilicet Sancte Scripture, in nostram consuetam sermocinationem, ob ædificationem, sim-plicium, qui hanc norunt tantummodo sive legendo sive audiendo . . .

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27 See Yorke (ed.), *Bishop Athelwold*.
28 Wulfstan the Cantor, *Life of St Æthelwold*.
29 Ælfric, *Prefaces*, pp. 107–8, 127. See also his *Catholic Homilies: First Series*.

[I, Ælfric, a student of the benevolent and venerable prelate, Æthelwold, send a greeting in the Lord to the lord Archbishop Sigeric. Even if rashly or presumptuously, we have, nevertheless, translated this book from Latin works, namely from Holy Scripture, into the language to which we are accustomed for the edification of the simple, who know only this language, either through reading or hearing it read . . .][30]

In this preface, which, because it is Latin, is exclusive to a learned audience like the archbishop of Canterbury, Sigeric, Ælfric lucidly explains his over-arching strategy of writing in English. It is a strategy very similar to that adopted by Æthelwold in his English preface to the *Rule of St Benedict*: for these reformers – first and second generation – the key to reaching the hearts and minds of the audience, the means of salvation for the 'simple', is through plain English ('simplicem Anglicam'). Ælfric, however, anticipates and addresses potential criticisms of this choice, and seeks to authenticate his use of the vernacular by the reassurance that his work is directly dependent on Latin works, and particularly Holy Scripture ('scilicet Sancte Scripture'). There might also be a touch of defensiveness in his statement that it is because of the intention to write for a simple audience that 'just plain English' is used: that 'we could not use obscure words' ('nec obscura . . . verba'), with the implication that he could have done if he had thought such words appropriate.[31] This convincing explanation and justification of his choices shows Ælfric to be conscious that there are those among his ecclesiastical seniors who might find his project to make Scripture accessible to the unlearned an unhappy decision.

In his Old English preface to the same set of homilies, Ælfric does not provide a mere translation of the Latin preface, indicating that the intended audiences of these two prefaces are different. In the vernacular version, the expectation is that not everyone will know anything about Ælfric (where it was enough to mention Æthelwold as teacher in the Latin preface), and the use of English demands explanation and the explicit support lent by using the name of Æthelmær, ealdorman of Wessex, Ælfric's influential and very senior lay patron. Moreover, it is here that Ælfric lays out his credentials

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30 Ælfric, *Prefaces*, pp. 107 (Latin text), 127 (English translation). See Swan, 'Identity and Ideology', p. 268, where she perceptively concludes that Ælfric 'employs the external-facing factor of rank, institution, and tradition to create a first-person voice which draws on a carefully-delineated Winchester reformed authority'.

31 On Ælfric's decision not to use 'obscure words' and how this should not reflect on his own exceptional skills in Latin and English writing, see Stephenson, 'Ælfric'. Similar defensiveness is seen in the preface to his *Grammar*; see Law, *Grammar and Grammarians*, p. 297.

providing the maximum authority for his work through the establishment of his literary lineage back to Alfred. This ultimately underscores his divine right to write with the claim that his inspiration came as a gift from God ('ðurh Godes gife'):

Þa bearn me on mode, Ic truwige ðurh Godes gife, þæt Ic ðas boc of Ledenum gereorde to Engliscre spræce awende, na þurh gebylde micelre lare, ac for ðan ðe Ic geseah and gehyrde mycel gedwyld on manegum Engliscum bocum, ðe ungelærede menn ðurh heora bilewitnysse to micclum wisdome tealdon. And me ofhreow þæt hi ne cuðon ne næfdon ða godspellican lare on heora gewritum, buton ðam mannum anum ðe þæt Leden cuðon, and buton þam bocum ðe Ælfred cyning snoterlice awende of Ledene on Englisc, ða synd to hæbbenne.

[Then it came into my mind, I believe through a gift of God, that I should translate this book from the language of Latin into English speech, not through the confidence of great learning, but because I saw and heard much heresy in many English books, which unlearned people through their simplicity esteemed as great wisdom. And it grieved me that they did not know nor did they have teaching of the gospels in their writing, except via those men alone who understood Latin, and except for those books which King Alfred wisely translated from Latin into English, which we still have.][32]

For Ælfric, the authority to write in English comes from his sources; that is, both his literal sources in the Bible and patristic explications of Scripture, and his historical antecedents.[33] These lauded antecedents do not include, it seems, the Vercelli and Blickling Homilies, extensive contemporary collections that Ælfric may not have cared too much for.[34] His sense of historical positioning provides additional truth and validity to his account of his work, and of great significance here is Ælfric's desire to highlight authority, not only through naming,[35] but also through longevity: the things that have most value and influence are those that are traceable and long-lasting.

In order to try to secure the longevity of his work in its original form, Ælfric famously requested adherence to the letter of his texts, in his preface to the First Series of *Catholic Homilies*, where he requests that copyists

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32 Treharne (ed. and trans.), *Old and Middle English*, pp. 129–34. See also Ælfric, *Prefaces*, pp. 108–10.
33 On Ælfric's sources, see J. Hill's work, esp. 'Authority and Intertextuality'.
34 See Scragg, 'Corpus of Vernacular Homilies'.
35 In all but two of Ælfric's seventeen prefaces, his name is the first or second word (where it is 'I, Ælfric'). See Swan, 'Identity and Ideology' for all the openings to Ælfric's prefaces.

follow his exemplar correctly.[36] Anxious at the prospect of transformation, Ælfric seeks to ensure the continued authorization and standardization of his work, just as his fellow reformers sought the standardization of the English language.[37] Authority for Ælfric is bound up in his innate understanding of the fluidity of medieval writing and the anxieties that pertain to anonymity and *mouvance*, or unfixedness.[38] Such textual instability is integral to manuscript culture, where individuals deliberately or involuntarily alter the texts being copied. The irony is, of course, that no instructions on his part could prevent Ælfric's name being separated from his homilies in the transmission of his works, for manuscripts copied during his lifetime contain both his work and the work of other, anonymous writers. Yet, beyond doubt, his corpus of religious and instructional texts – the homilies and saints' Lives, the *Grammar* and *Colloquy* – consolidated the growing status of English as a prestigious medium of writing, and helped provide so solid a foundation for literate culture that not even two eleventh-century conquests and the misapprehensions of modern scholars could actually displace the presence of English alongside Latin, and later French, in the earlier medieval period.

Authority iv: the promotion of ideology

In promoting his own work, Ælfric promotes the ideology of the Benedictine Reform, though in a way that is often quite idiosyncratic and doctrinaire. He shows himself at all times to be highly alert to his perceived reader-listeners, a plural audience of both men and women that ranges from the scribe copying exemplars of his texts, to the senior prelates judging his work's merits or seeking his advice, to the novice monks learning Latin, to the illiterate layperson struggling to understand central points of Christian doctrine. Ælfric's presence in his texts is overt and seeks to answer all the anticipated questions of his readers, who are thus always already present in the text. This represents, in effect, the all-consuming authority of the author embedded within the work, which, in the case of Ælfric, was reinforced by his appeal to the highest Church authority in Anglo-Saxon England, and by the adoption of his two series of *Catholic Homilies* and his *Lives of Saints* at Canterbury,[39] and almost

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36 Treharne (ed. and trans.), *Old and Middle English*, pp. 129–34.

37 See the discussion of the Winchester Standard in Chapter 10 above.

38 Anonymity might be one of the reasons Ælfric distrusted some of the vernacular texts already in circulation in Anglo-Saxon England. On textual *mouvance* in this period, see, *inter alia*, J. Hill, 'Ælfric, Authorial Identity'.

39 Ælfric, *Catholic Homilies: First Series*, pp. 162–3.

certainly at Worcester too.[40] These sets of religious readings for Sundays and feast days form the basis of the English prose corpus in the later Anglo-Saxon period, greatly expanded by the sermon writings of Wulfstan I, archbishop of York, and by the works of the earlier anonymous writers in monastic scriptoria, including the Vercelli Book homilist and the compiler of the Blickling Homilies; by means of these texts, vernacular religious learning was articulated through those in control of pastoral care, who in turn ventriloquized the homilists' voices for multiple and varied audiences during the next two and a half centuries.

Another set of English texts exuding authority, but this time without known authors, is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Like the work of the authors discussed so far, the Chronicle flourished in a monastic environment, owing its production to the major scriptoria, such as those at Worcester, Christ Church Canterbury, Winchester and Peterborough.[41] In terms of a centralized authority and the promotion of an ideology that sought to underscore the political, historical and social power of that authority, the Chronicle did for the secular state what Ælfric, Æthelwold and the other reformers did for the Church in England. At the monasteries where it was composed and copied, until the later eleventh century at least, resources and time seem to have been found to maintain the production of this most significant historical record, even if only a line or two were composed, or records were copied retrospectively en bloc. The set of manuscripts that survives is thus, to a large extent, self-authenticating; its authority, its legitimacy and validity stem from its simply being. Moreover, the fact that all of the surviving codices were written over long periods of time attests to their sustained value to the institutions that maintained them and clearly illustrates the authority that these manuscripts were felt to possess and to reflect.

What is particularly interesting about the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is its ability both to function on behalf of the systems of power and to sustain a national story in the face of the Conquest and oppression.[42] In the post-Conquest period, 1066–1154, the entries in the latest parts of the manuscripts comprising the Chronicle become almost the lone voice of an old Englishness under serious and very real threat from the new political order, itself voiced predominantly in Latin from 1070 to 1100 and, from 1100 onwards, in French too. 'Lone voice',

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40 On Worcester, see most recently Treharne, 'Scribal Connections'.
41 See Chapter 9 above, and Swanton (ed. and trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The Chronicle is not a single, uniform work, but a set of manuscripts and manuscript fragments of different dates and from different origins that together are known as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.
42 See Sheppard, *Families of the King*.

here, is not to dispense with the many hundreds of texts written in English in the same post-Conquest decades as the Chronicle, but these are resistant to the Conquest in many different ways, as will be discussed below.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle itself becomes a national record par excellence, formed from a mosaic of regional pieces; this national record, however, is not written into de luxe books, nor is it elaborately presented. Instead, those manuscripts that survive yield an authoritative picture of the resources given over to the copying of this set of works, and reflect the subtle and not-so-subtle shifts in power, at any given time in the history of Anglo-Saxon England and beyond. Datable to the late ninth century onwards, the version known as Manuscript A (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 173) is the earliest copy to survive. It contains the only almost contemporary accounts of the reigns of King Alfred's son, Edward the Elder, and his son, Æthelstan, and their battles against the forces of the Vikings in the first half of the tenth century. While there is extensive prose, densely packed into the manuscript, to account for Edward's reign, Æthelstan's reign (924–39) and the sixteen years following, up to 955, are displayed through only two folios (26^r–7^r), and even these few contain multiple blank annals, and large amounts of white space. Of most note is the embedding within these folios of the famous poem, *The Battle of Brunanburh*, a panegyric devoted to Æthelstan's military and political successes against his Viking and Scottish aggressors in 937 CE (Figure 22.1).[43] This poem (written as if it were prose, like all Anglo-Saxon poetry) is replete with heroic references to the battlefield and the animals that prey on the corpses of fallen soldiers, and to the superlative warrior qualities of the archetypal Germanic lord, cast as the retributive king of a chosen people. This is a mini-epic, immersed in the truth of the chronicle form, promoting the ideology of a nation; a nation whose early victories against the Celts in the fifth century is a demandingly present acoustic ghost throughout this authorized account of an ideal king.

Such entertaining propaganda, served up as if on behalf of the state through the work of scribes in monastic scriptoria, is highlighted and made the more emphatic in these annals by the physical setting of the work in its manuscript page, surrounded by the sense of space created by literally empty years. Later entries attempt to maintain the promotion of the concept of an English nation state and its heroic sensibilities, but by the end of the eleventh century, there was little left to celebrate. The authority evinced in the chronicling of the earlier Anglo-Saxon centuries visibly dissipates in the crumbling and anxiety-

43 Campbell (ed.), *Battle of Brunanburh*; Carroll (ed.), 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'.

22.1 Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS A (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 173), fol. 26[r].

ridden folios of the later annals of the A-text of the *Chronicle*,[44] including those
pages narrating the Conquests in 1016 and 1066 at the swords of Cnut and
William respectively. Similarly, the power and authority of what was left of
the Anglo-Saxon state is witnessed in the crowded text of the latter folios of
London, British Library, MS Cotton Domitian A. viii, the lack of material
resources directly impacting upon the space available to the scribe
(Figure 22.2).[45] Copied at Christ Church Canterbury in the first half of the

44 Bately (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS A*.
45 Dumville (ed.), *Facsimile of MS F*. See particularly fols. 65–70.

22.2 Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS F (London, British Library, MS Cotton Domitian A. viii), bilingual text, fol. 69ʳ.

twelfth century, this bilingual Chronicle is squeezed onto the folios in its latter stages, the Latin text extending into the margins and the English text compressed into narrowly ruled lines, in a bid to make the voices of a conquered people heard and understood.

Authority v: delegated power

It is clear from the discussion thus far that the English language, and all manner of texts written in it, was a formidable political, religious, social and

cultural agent in Anglo-Saxon England and beyond. It was the authorized and validated written medium for national elite networks, ecclesiastical and political, and sometimes both simultaneously; for a series of governments and monarchies up to *c*. 1070; and for a number of culturally assured social groups throughout the period. Moreover, and as is easily forgotten, it was the language of the vast majority of the nation.

Testifying to the textual power of English perhaps more obviously than any other work examined yet are the letters, writs and law codes issued by successive kings in Anglo-Saxon England from the early centuries onwards, but particularly from the tenth and eleventh centuries.[46] These law codes had a continued life after the Norman Conquest, and a number were incorporated into new manuscript contexts, some being translated into Latin; but by the twelfth century, the law codes are less representative of the power of a dynamic and confident nation state, and are more about gathering that state's political and legal institutions in a process of assimilation and overwriting.[47]

Any one of a number of kings' legal and linguistic affairs could fruitfully be studied in the context of the authority of English. Over seventy writs in Latin and English survive from Æthelstan's reign (924–39), though most in later copies only. Hundreds of extant diplomata illustrate the administrative prowess of Anglo-Saxon kings, and the significant role of English, even as boundary clauses embedded in Latin text, in the operation of government.[48] Cnut is a useful case study in the fundamental literacy of English administration. He was king by conquest and not English, but Danish; he was possibly a recent convert to Christianity; and he was at least as proficient in breaking the law as he was in upholding and promoting it.[49] Part of his appeal is his paradoxical nature, and his sheer political genius, ably assisted by his Danish and English statesmen, some of the latter doubling up as the English Church's senior prelates. Notable among these senior prelate-statesmen is Wulfstan I, archbishop of York (1002–23) and bishop of Worcester (until 1016), and one of the principal advisors to both King Æthelred and King Cnut (who reigned 1016–35).[50] All of the business of government in the reign of Cnut is issued in either English or Latin, even

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46 On laws and law codes, see Wormald, *Making of English Law*.
47 For a nuanced articulation of the use of English sources and prelates in the construction of the new Norman state, see Garnett, *Conquered England*; see also Wormald, *Making of English Law*, for the individual manuscripts.
48 Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, nos. 386–458. See also *The Electronic Sawyer*, www.esawyer.org.uk.
49 Lawson, *Cnut*.
50 On Wulfstan, see the essays in Townend (ed.), *Wulfstan*.

though it appears that there was also a vibrant Old Norse literary and cultural environment at Cnut's court in Winchester.[51] The key to determining how accepted the use of English had become as an official language of the court and its administration, as well as a language authorized and sanctified by the Church, is to comprehend that for all written materials produced during these centuries, there was a choice of language. In the case of Cnut, for his law codes and some of his most significant royal statements, he chose English. One can imagine that he will have chosen English as a result of the influence of Wulfstan – a prolific writer in both English and Latin, much the more famous for the former than the latter.[52] Wulfstan himself is known for composing some of the most rhetorically exciting and politically engaged sermons, as well as for drafting legislation for both the kings he served.[53] In his service to Cnut – a Viking king, whose early years on the throne saw him eradicate a number of the English nobility in an effort to secure his position – Wulfstan seems to have been instrumental in stage-managing the public relations exercise that was essential to winning over the English people. A record of a meeting between the Danes and the English at Oxford in 1018 specifically mentions Cnut's undertaking to uphold the earlier laws of Edgar; the same statement is made at the opening of the Letter written by Cnut to his people in 1020.[54] Such a promise, together with a debt to earlier Anglo-Saxon law codes in Cnut's Law Code of 1020, situates Cnut firmly in the tradition of his (usurped) Anglo-Saxon regal predecessors. Wulfstan's hand in all of these legal materials is evident, and the more so when one considers Cnut's Letter of 1020 itself.[55] Using English, a language Cnut must surely have had to learn on his accession, Cnut addresses his entire realm, insisting on the upholding of the law and reassuring his subjects of his good intentions as king. Mentioning God seventeen times in the course of the relatively short epistle, it becomes clear that this is an intelligent exercise in repairing a tarnished image: propaganda to promote the king's own piety. While it is broadcast in the voice of the king, the Letter would actually have been read out by Cnut's delegates throughout the

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51 Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*'.

52 On his Latin compositions, see T. N. Hall, 'Wulfstan's Latin Sermons'.

53 The *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, written in 1014, is the best known, and is widely anthologized. It is discussed by Wilcox, 'Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi*'; Bethurum, in Wulfstan, *Homilies*; and Wormald, *Making of English Law*.

54 Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 346. For Cnut's Letter of 1020, see Treharne (ed. and trans.), *Old and Middle English*, pp. 269–75.

55 Keynes observes that Wulfstan might have composed the last third of the letter himself ('Old English Additions', p. 96).

shires – his ealdormen and sheriffs, bishops and other administrative of-ficials. The shift in the voice of the speaker two-thirds of the way through from the rather penitential first-person voice of the king to the plural pronoun 'we', results in an insistence that the audience concur with the closing dictates of the Letter. These dictates are typically Wulfstanian, and include an intensification of the emotive tone that typifies Wulfstan's highly effective rhetorical style:[56]

> And eac hy us furðor lærað þæt we sceolon, eallan mægene and eallon myhton, þone ecan mildan God inlice secan, lufian, and weorðian and ælc unriht ascunian; þæt synd mægslagan, and morðslagan, and mansworan, and wiccean, and wælcyrian, and æwbrecan, and syblegeru.

> [And also they [the laws of Edgar] further teach us that we should, with all our strength and our might, thoroughly seek, love and honour the eternal, merciful God, and shun all evil ones; those are, slayers of kin, and murderers, and perjurers, and wizards, and witches, and adulterers and the incestuous.][57]

Wulfstan's ear-catching alliteration and doubling of near synonyms ('eallan mægene and eallon myhton'), his listing of evil deeds – again alliterating in pairs or triplets – and his use of adverbial intensifiers ('inlice') pack a powerful auditory punch. The appropriateness of style and content for its intended audience illustrates the confidence the best writers had in using English.[58]

Cnut's Letter of 1020 survives in one copy in the York Gospels (York Minster Library 1), datable to before 1023. Added to the end of the Gospels are three sermons, the Letter and prayers, included at the instigation of Wulfstan I, who marked up two of the sermons.[59] Exemplified most convinc-ingly in this book is the shared agenda of the Church and the state in the dissemination of secular and ecclesiastical law promulgated through English. The act of an archbishop gathering significant materials in English illustrates that the vernacular was as valid, and, arguably, as prestigious a language within its own textual remit as Latin was within its very broad uses, and that generally the two languages worked in close harmony to provide the essential tools for an emergent literate culture.

The York Gospels, as Wulfstan's personal property, passed to subsequent archbishops before being used as an oath-book by York Minster in the later

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56 See, e.g., Orchard, 'Wulfstan as Reader'.
57 Treharne (ed. and trans.), *Old and Middle English*, pp. 270–3.
58 Wulfstan's highly effective prose style can be contrasted with Ælfric's equally effective, but more complex, poetic prose. See Bredehoft, 'Ælfric and Late Old English Verse'.
59 See Barker (ed.), *York Gospels*; and Heslop, 'Production'.

Middle Ages. It may have been its association with the prelate, its de luxe nature, or a combination of both of these things that saved it. The same cannot be said, unfortunately, for the other Latin books that belonged to the archiepiscopal estate at Sherburn-in-Elmet in the mid-eleventh century, and which are also listed in the English additions to the York Gospels.[60] These comprised 'Þa cyrican madmas on Scirburnan: þæt synd twa Cristes bec and ii rodan, and i aspiciens and i ad te levavi and ii pistol bec and i mæsseboc and i ymener and i salter and i calic and i disc' [the church treasures in Sherburn: those are two Gospel books, two crosses, one sacramentary, one gradual and two epistolaries, one massbook, one hymnal, one psalter, one chalice and paten-dish]. If one of the Gospel books was the York Gospels, there are seven other books that appear to be in Latin (or, at least, do not seem to have been in English) unaccounted for. In a sense, this book list and the homilies and Letter of Cnut that appear in the same gathering provide a snapshot of the role of English vis-à-vis Latin in the eleventh century: English never competed on an equal footing with Latin as the main written language of Anglo-Saxon England, but it did have a very significant role to play, particularly in contributing to and reflecting the pastoral activities of the Church and the promotion of a Christian nation state. As such, it is no surprise that when books can be pinpointed to an owner or particular user in the eleventh century, it is almost always a senior ecclesiastic or an aristocratic layperson.[61] These figures, in their sustained use of English texts and manuscripts, dignified the language and its authority in late Anglo-Saxon England; and they utilized the vernacular materials in their pastoral, ecclesiastical and administrative duties, and, at times, for entertainment, raising its status significantly. Both the function of and audience for English in the twelfth century are much less clear.

Authority VI: accepted truth

One definition of 'authority' is that which functions as an accepted truth, and, as should be clear, English was a prestigious, officially sponsored written language in Anglo-Saxon England. In considering the status of English in the post-Conquest period, however, it is has been very widely claimed that

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60 Listed, and shown in plate 8.3, in Norton, 'York Minster', pp. 214, 217. The translation is my own.

61 See Günzel (ed.), *Ælfwine's Prayerbook*; for Leofric, see Treharne, 'Producing a Library'; for Stigand, see T.-A. Cooper, 'Homilies'; for Wulfstan II, see, *inter alia*, Mason, *St Wulfstan*; for Queen Emma, see Campbell (ed. and trans.), *Encomium Emmae reginae*.

English rapidly lost any prestige it might have had, and in comparison to the status it had *previously* had, that is relatively true. Certainly, any pretence at adhering to the linguistic traditions of English kings before Harold was soon jettisoned by William the Conqueror in 1070, when it became clear that superficial acts of appeasement would not ensure the English acceptance of his monarchy; thus, the last writ in English was issued in around 1070 or so.[62] Whereas English's important role as a language authorized by government was thus seriously compromised, another 'accepted truth' in some modern scholarship is that in the post-Conquest period, and particularly the twelfth century, English, in essence, disappears as a written language.[63] Nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, there are well over one hundred manuscripts written in the century and a half after the Conquest that have extensive English contents, or that include English glosses and annotations.[64] Just the number itself suggests that English had some authority within the institutions that produced it and the communities for whom the texts functioned in different ways, including as markers of inclusivity and shared inherited, cultural references. More to the point, perhaps, the authority of English is shown through the continued use of earlier versions of texts; as a language and as a literary and religious vehicle for the dissemination of learning, English had its own momentum.

English maintained its role as a voice articulating accepted truth and the authority of the English Church. For the production of English, the Benedictine network of monasteries, active in the late tenth and eleventh centuries, continued to be highly significant throughout the twelfth century. There seems to have been a programme (albeit somewhat patchily represented in extant manuscripts now) of copying and adaptation;[65] post-Conquest manuscripts contain earlier Old English texts in modernized form, recontextualized, and juxtaposed with newer translations at monastic cathedrals from Worcester to Winchester and Christ Church Canterbury. Law codes were copied down, and charters and other diplomata archived in collections at institutions like Rochester and Peterborough; and texts as varied as saints' Lives, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, pedagogic dialogues, prognostications, a number of poems, and patristic writings were produced

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62 Bates (ed.), *Regesta Regum*, pp. 43–50.
63 For the debate, see Treharne, 'Categorization, Periodization'.
64 Da Rold *et al.*, *Production and Use of English Manuscripts*.
65 There are some elements of textual manufacture that suggest a systematic attempt at lexical updating, similar methods of physical production and shared compilatory techniques.

in English for the edification of those within and without monastic walls, including, of course, women.[66]

As a whole corpus of texts, English materials up to *c.* 1200 chose to ignore the Norman Conquest in ways that are resonant of the responses of whole societies silenced by cultural trauma. Refusal of the sermons, saints' Lives and encyclopaedic works to explicitly name the Norman Conquest is poignant and yet to be properly studied. The only exception is the well-known Peterborough Chronicle, which, as the final part of a product endorsed by centuries of production within a cogent, ecclesiastical and English Benedictine network, had a confidence to express dismay and discomfort, and to speak for a people subjugated. But within the variety of manuscripts is an equal variety of texts, the visible exemplification of resources given over to the production of English, and testimony to the sustained dynamism of the written vernacular and the longevity of the Insular script (or a hybrid version) in which English was copied. There is no possibility of silencing the articulate and relevant voices of these unofficial arbiters of conquest and colonization.

An individual book that lets us end where we began – with a gloss – is the Eadwine Psalter, Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R. 17. 1 (which is also discussed in Chapter 3 above), a mid-twelfth-century Christ Church Canterbury production (Figure 22.3).[67] This is a triple psalter preceded by a calendar and followed by the Canticles. The psalter combines Jerome's Gallican, Roman and Hebrew versions of the Psalms with the *parva glosatura*,[68] Insular French and Anglo-Saxon complete interlinear glosses. Other texts explicating the Psalms include exegetical prologues and a full cycle of lavishly detailed illustrations. This huge volume, weighing perhaps twenty pounds, testifies to a flourishing multimedia culture of literacies, where languages sat alongside each other in a collaborative venture, produced over a period of time by a good number of monastic scribes, plus a group of professional artists. It will have cost a great deal of money to produce, and

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66 Such as London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian D. xiv (*c.* 1150, Christ Church Canterbury), which might not have been produced for women, but seems to have ended up in female hands by the fourth quarter of the twelfth century; and the Witney manuscript of the *Regula sancti Benedicti*, which was copied for female religious in the earlier thirteenth century. On all of this, see Swan and Treharne (eds.), *Rewriting Old English*.

67 See Gibson *et al.* (eds.), *Eadwine Psalter*. See also James (ed.), *Canterbury Psalter*.

68 The Latin commentary to the Psalms, attributed in the twelfth century to Anselm of Laon. See Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, p. 64; and in relation to the Eadwine Psalter specifically, see Gibson, 'Latin Apparatus', in Gibson *et al.*, *Eadwine Psalter*, pp. 108–9.

22.3 Eadwine Psalter (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R. 17. 1), fol. 6[r].

while the Latin obviously takes precedence, both visually and in terms of liturgical significance, the role of English and Anglo-French is noteworthy.

The Eadwine Psalter is the penultimate survivor in a long line of such books dating back to the ninth-century Utrecht Psalter[69] (which was made on the

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69 Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS Bibl. Rhenotraiectinae I Nr 32. This was made on the continent, but translated to Canterbury by the early eleventh century. See Horst *et al.* (eds.), *'Utrecht Psalter' in Medieval Art*.

continent, but was translated to Canterbury) and ending in the slightly later, unfinished Psalter, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Lat. 8846, dated to the end of the twelfth century and containing a handful of English glosses. The Paris Psalter uses the Eadwine Psalter as a source, but contains very few glosses. Even so, the copyist corrects a mistake seen in the earlier Eadwine Psalter, showing the scribe's engagement with the text and obvious knowledge of English. Both codices, then, provide substantial evidence of the interest at Christ Church Canterbury in a type of monumental scholarly work, and, given the fact that Christ Church is the pre-eminent English institution, illustrate the desire to demonstrate and promote the trilingual proficiency and heritage of the Church in medieval England.[70]

In its physical form, though, the Eadwine manuscript signifies a liminal space on the threshold of a new era in English, even while it is redolent of manifold textual, linguistic and intellectual traditions and practices. It was produced at a key point in English cultural history as the changes wrought by the Conquest in 1066 become firmly embedded culturally, linguistically and politically. The Eadwine Psalter represents the zenith of de luxe book-making, manufactured perhaps as a special commission for the monastery. Its splendour and its integrated design unequivocally demonstrate the praxis of multilingualism, visually striking as well as culturally significant, almost certainly reflecting the monastic politics of Canterbury *c.* 1160, a politics that very much included English as a viable and essential language of the most formal and elevated expressions of devotion.

The power and the glory

Through creation and translation, through adaptation and reconfiguration, English texts assumed a national significance from the late ninth century onwards that permitted a variety of major roles for the vernacular, unmatched by any other European vernacular of this early era. The tenth to twelfth centuries witnessed momentous change, but throughout these years, English remained a stable and stabilizing force for kings, bishops and many different audiences. In English, we witness the ciphering of the *Logos*; the regulation of monastic life; the issuing of royal law; the writing of poetry to entertain, engage and educate; the effect of exhortation that would ensure the salvation of souls; the theory and practice of good Christian living; the certain empathy

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70 For the comparable scholarly, glossed volume, see Parkes, 'Ordinatio and Compilatio' in his *Scribes, Scripts and Readers*.

of audiences for the plight of conquered and martyred saints; and the hushed silence of listeners to heroic plights and baffling computistica. Its textual variety is matched by its multiple material forms and by the diversity of detectable functions. There can be no doubt that the English language was a written force to be reckoned with at every level of society, and continuing research will assist in building a more complete picture of its complex and fascinating history, and its relationships with other languages in a multitude of contexts.

Chapter 23

Crossing the language divide: Anglo-Scandinavian language and literature

RUSSELL POOLE

The active Scandinavian presence in England can be analysed as follows.[1] Phases of raiding, overwintering and settlement (first recorded in 793,[2] 850/1[3] and 876[4] respectively) ultimately led to the development of regional polities. Three of these can be distinguished within the Danelaw: the southern part of the earlier kingdom of Northumbria; the Viking half of Mercia, comprising Derby, Leicester, Lincoln, Nottingham and Stamford (later known as the Five Boroughs), and their respective counties; and parts of East Anglia. In the eleventh century the conquest and subsequent reign of Cnut saw a further significant influx of Scandinavians into England, centring on London and the south. Only the Northumbrian region lasted for long as an independent Viking lordship, and yet hundreds of linguistically Norse personal and place names are attested in the Danelaw, some of them new coinages in England, and we also note the huge Norse influence on medieval and later dialects in northern England.[5] These factors point to the longer-term existence of communities of native Norse-speakers in that portion of the country.[6] The end-point of these phases, complete assimilation of these communities, may reasonably be guessed to have occurred between 1100 and 1200 CE.

The kingdom of Northumbria, the Five Boroughs and London had very different histories with respect to Scandinavian activity.[7] Equally diverse were

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1 Cf. R. A. Hall, 'Scandinavian Settlement in England', pp. 147–8. Thanks are due to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Canada, which funded research towards this chapter.
2 Baker (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS F*, p. 55.
3 Bately (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS A*, p. 44.
4 *Ibid.*, p. 50, *s.a.* 851.
5 The term 'Norse' is used here and henceforward to cover all varieties of the Germanic-based Scandinavian languages spoken in the Middle Ages.
6 Abrams and Parsons, 'Place-Names', p. 403; Parsons, 'Scandinavian Language', pp. 307–8.
7 Cf. Abrams and Parsons, 'Place-Names', p. 382.

the categories of Anglo-Scandinavian community and individual active in England. We have evidence for the presence of itinerant individuals, such as skalds, entertainers, traders, diplomats, interpreters, clergy, missionaries and mercenary warriors; itinerant groups, such as housecarls, embassies, armies and trading expeditions; groups with longer-term residency, such as the entourage at royal courts in such prestige centres as York, London and Winchester, and artisans and merchants at trading and manufacturing centres, such as York, Lincoln and London; and settled groups in the countryside, such as farmers and estate-holders. With this diversity in mind, as Dawn Hadley points out, we should not assume that the Scandinavian settlers had a common identity across or within these different regions, or that they and their descendants were bound together by inherited ethnic affiliations.[8]

While it stands to reason that the Anglo-Scandinavians resident in these different regions had what we can broadly term a textual culture of some kind, oral and literary, we have a paucity of witnesses to support any claims on that score. The legacy is altogether in contrast with that of Anglo-Norman, which survives in a wide and varied corpus of literary and other texts, albeit from no earlier than the twelfth century.[9] To build up any kind of picture we have to extrapolate from texts preserved in Old Norse, along with the other main relevant vernaculars of Old English and Anglo-Norman, also keeping Latin sources in mind and occasionally assisted by evidence from material culture.

Also in contrast with Anglo-Norman, the degree of separateness between the languages of English and Norse was far from total. Indeed, it seems likely that differences between the various Germanic-based vernaculars, Old English, Old Norse, Old Saxon and Old High German, were far from creating an impermeable barrier. The transfer of poetic materials from Old Saxon to Old English, as exemplified by the textual history of the *Heliand* and *Genesis B*, can serve as a model of the scribal processes.[10] There were clearly corresponding processes when it came to oral exchanges across these vernaculars. Various members of the population would have had skills as interpreters, go-betweens, negotiators and mediators. On this, the Ohthere and Wulfstan additions to the Alfredian translation of Orosius are our best evidence. Ohthere, a Norwegian, and Wulfstan, an Anglo-Saxon or perhaps a Frisian,[11]

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8 Hadley, *Vikings in England*, pp. 83–4.
9 Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, pp. 362–73.
10 Behaghel (ed.), *Heliand und Genesis*, p. xiv; Schwab, '*Battle of Maldon*', p. 79. See, for these and other possible examples, Bredehoft, 'Old Saxon Influence'.
11 Bately (ed.), *Old English Orosius*, p. lxi.

give King Alfred oral descriptions of their voyages, and these get reduced to writing in a largely communicative and intelligible fashion,[12] despite perhaps some occasional guesswork or conversation at cross-purposes, as in the naming of and distinctions between the whale and the walrus and between Ireland and Iceland.[13] Helpful in this process will have been the audience's awareness of the kinds of information to be conveyed. The interest not just in how far one can sail in a given number of days and which side of the ship land lies on[14] but also in local resources, peoples and livelihoods will have been predictable, and is recognizably akin to that seen in *Eiríks saga rauða* [*Saga of Eric the Red*]. Such accounts, though separated chronologically in scribal terms by some three hundred years, may be representative of a kind of voyagers' and traders' discourse that operated in the North Atlantic, regardless of language and ethnicity. Naturally there are only the sketchiest of testimonies to this discourse today.

Much more fortunate, in terms of the preservation of their work, were the skalds (court poets of Icelandic and Norwegian background), who appear to have exercised their own important role as interpreters, envoys and way-finders. The impressive level of accuracy in the treatment of English place names in Norse texts is probably owing to their linguistic skills.[15] It is the considerable surviving legacy of poems by the skalds that by default, given the extreme exiguity of the runic evidence,[16] constitutes our main datable source for Anglo-Scandinavian textuality. Of course this corpus has limitations as evidence. It was relevant principally to Scandinavian leaders and their retinues and in all likelihood much less so to the settled population.[17] Some of it may in fact have been composed and performed in Denmark or Norway rather than England; we can infer from his repeated visits to Denmark (1019, 1023 and 1027)[18] that Cnut maintained royal residences there, and the case may have been similar with other Scandinavian leaders. But, whatever the case, some of this poetry arguably shows English influence. Reciprocally, though to a much lesser extent, Norse influence can be detected in a few Old English texts.

In the following discussion, I shall attempt to identify indications of Anglo-Scandinavian literary activity within the three main regions of Anglo-Scandinavian

12 *Ibid.*, p. lxii.
13 Lund (ed.) and Fell (trans.), *Two Voyagers*, pp. 56–63.
14 Vanderbilt, 'Orality', p. 389.
15 Townend, *English Place Names*, p. 98.
16 Barnes and Page, *Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions*, pp. 87–97.
17 Parsons, 'Scandinavian Language', p. 307.
18 Garmonsway, *Cnut*, pp. 19–24.

population and speech communities mentioned above, centring respectively on York, London and Lincoln. I begin with poetic texts and later turn to legendary material of various kinds.

York

Our attestations for York (and to some extent the affiliated Viking kingdom based in Dublin) begin exceptionally early, possibly at the turn of the tenth century. The most significant poet is Egill Skalla-Grímsson, an Icelander whose *floruit* lies in the first half of the tenth century. A semi-legendary account of his deeds appears in the early thirteenth-century *Egils saga*. One of the works attributed to him there is a praise poem for Æthelstan entitled *Aðalsteinsdrápa*, of which two fragments are extant:

> Nú hefr foldgnárr felda –
> fellr jǫrð und nið Ellu –
> hjaldr-snerrandi, harra
> hǫfuðbaðmr, þría jǫfra.
> Aðalsteinn of vann annat –
> alt's lægra kynfrægjum –
> (hér sverjum þess, hyrjar
> hrannbrjótr) konungmanni.

[Now the impeller of battle, the king's chief offspring, ?towering over? land, has felled three kings. Land falls under the kinsman of Ella. Aðalsteinn won a second time, all is subservient to this kingly person celebrated for his kindred; I swear this here, breaker of the fire of the wave [giver of gold, lord].][19]

> Nú liggr hæst und hraustum
> hreinbraut Aðalsteini.

[Now the highest road of the reindeer [the Highlands] lies under brave Aðalsteinn.][20]

There is a long tradition of scholarly scepticism concerning the genuineness of this poem and the historicity of the circumstances of composition and delivery described in the saga,[21] but the attribution at any rate has been

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19 St. 1: Nordal (ed.), *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* (henceforward *ÍF 2*), p. 146, v.21; cf. Jónsson (ed.), *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* (henceforward *Skj*), AI, p. 34, BI, p. 30. Here and henceforward, stanza numbers are cited in accordance with the enumerations adopted in the forthcoming edition *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*.

20 St. 2: *ÍF 2*, p. 147, v.22; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 35, BI, p. 30.

21 E.g., *ÍF 2*, pp. xv, 146; Parsons, 'Scandinavian Language', p. 307.

capably defended, notably by Dietrich Hofmann,[22] and this defence could be extended to two additional stanzas associated with the Aðalsteinn episode in the saga that express thanks for the king's gifts.[23] Indications of Egill's contact with English speakers are the word 'harri', here seen in its first attestation,[24] and the dynastic name Ella. In Old English usage *herra* carries strong overtones of divine lordship, and this may play into its adoption by Egill and a succession of later skalds, since, as we shall see, the closeness of kingship to Godhead is a pervasive theme in English royal ideology. The name Ella is explained by Hofmann as referring to a South Saxon king Ælle who figures in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle *s.a.* 477, 485 and 491 as one of the Anglo-Saxon conquerors of Britain;[25] Bede states that this Ælle was the first king to exercise overlordship over the peoples south of the Humber (*HE*, II.5). Although Æthelstan could scarcely number Ælle among his ancestors, genealogical data are notoriously flexible, and an allusion to the primal overlord in an encomium to a newly triumphant tenth-century overlord might have served as an appropriate recognition of the scale of Æthelstan's reconquest. Comparably, the anonymous Old English poem *The Battle of Brunanburh*, in praise of Æthelstan and his brother Eadmund's reconquest, recalls the primal conquest of Britain by Angles and Saxons. Egill's allusion might alternatively be to the sixth-century Ælle of Deira who, according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, succeeded to the kingship of Northumbria in 560 and ruled for thirty years. Less plausible is identification as a later Ælle of York, since this king was killed by Vikings in 867 in what were traditionally described as gruesome and humiliating circumstances; he was nonetheless a familiar figure to Scandinavians and may provide the prime inspiration for mentions of Ella in later skaldic verse. Egill's information about figures of the Anglo-Saxon dynastic past may have been acquired as part of his necessary skaldic stock-in-trade. Indications of a tenth-century English aristocratic and monastic interest in notable personages and dynasties from the Anglo-Saxon past can be seen in, for instance, *Liber Eliensis* and Æthelweard's Chronicle.[26] Egill's characterization of Æthelstan as 'kynfrægr' [celebrated for his kin] appears to chime with this dynastic ideology and it is also apparent in *Brunanburh*.

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22 Hofmann, *Nordisch-englische Lehnbeziehungen* (henceforward *NEL*), pp. 24–5; cf. Hines, 'Egill's *Hǫfuðlausn*', p. 100, and references there given.
23 *ÍF* 2, pp. 144–5; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 51, BI, p. 45.
24 *NEL*, p. 23.
25 *Ibid.*, pp. 24–5.
26 J. Campbell, 'England, c. 991', pp. 12–13.

Æthelstan marks what Matthew Townend has termed a 'high point of Anglo-Scandinavian interaction', as indicated for example by the marriage of his sister Eadgyth to Sigtryggr Sigtryggsson and his fostering of Hákon Haraldsson; his brother Eadmund was well enough remembered by the Anglo-Scandinavian community for the eleventh-century Icelandic skald Óttarr svarti to describe both Æthelred and Edmund Ironside as the kinsmen of Játmundr.[27] In such an ambiance contacts between Norse and English poets may well have occurred, and Hofmann draws attention to evidence that the poet of *Brunanburh* had some familiarity with the work of his Norse counterparts. The kenning 'guðhafoc' [battle-hawk], meaning 'eagle' (line 64) is the most telling indication: even though there are no reliable early attestations of the precisely cognate combination *gunn(ar) haukr* in the skaldic corpus, the general template was prevalent and is, as it happens, exemplified in one of Egill's two stanzas of acknowledgement to Æthelstan.[28] By contrast, the word 'cnear' (line 35), used in the poem to designate 'warship', is probably a technological adoption from Old Norse[29] with a firm footing in the English language, perhaps as part of the putative seafarers' discourse already discussed, and cannot be regarded as a specifically literary borrowing.

The saga statement that *Aðalsteinsdrápa* was performed in England in the presence of Æthelstan is consistent, as Judith Jesch has observed, with the poet's assertion of his own presence, in 'sverjum þess' [I swear this], references to the place and time of delivery, and preference for the present tense.[30] Also, the poet's diction and style are consistent with a less than totally native command on the part of the audience. He adopts a predictable patterning of clause components, such that the final four positions in the last line of each four-line half-stanza (*helmingr*) complete the syntax and content of the first or second lines respectively. The kenning usage, although well beyond the scope of Old English poetry, has recognizable commonalities with Old English examples: thus 'hreinbraut' [reindeer-road, i.e., mountains] is formed on the same logical basis as 'swanrad' [swan-road, i.e., sea]. Two appositions occur; normally not much favoured in skaldic idiom, they point to the poet's emulation of variation, a dominant feature of Old English poetic style.

A second Egill attribution is *Hǫfuðlausn*, which according to *Egils saga* was delivered at York in praise of Eiríkr blóðøx (Eric bloodaxe);[31] the dramatic

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27 Townend, 'Pre-Cnut Praise-Poetry', p. 356.
28 *ÍF* 2, p. 144; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 51, BI, p. 45; *NEL*, pp. 166–7.
29 Thier, 'Ships', pp. 152–3.
30 Jesch, 'Skaldic Verse', p. 316.
31 Hines, 'Egill's *Hǫfuðlausn*', p. 88; though contrast Downham, 'Eric Bloodaxe'.

circumstances are vouched for in the Egill attribution *Arinbjarnarkviða*. The earliest witnesses of *Hǫfuðlausn* date from 350–400 years later[32] but we can have a degree of confidence in linguistic features of the poem that are most readily explained by contact with English speakers in the tenth century.[33] Notable is 'folkhagi' [hedge of the people],[34] a type of circumlocution for 'leader' customary in Old English poetics but rare in Old Norse. *Hǫfuðlausn* is also evidently part of broader communications across the vernaculars, taking its place in a group of small-scale praise poems that seem to be ushered in by the Carolingian Latin encomium *De Pippine regis Victoria Avarica* from around 796.[35] *Hǫfuðlausn* resembles *Ludwigslied* and *The Battle of Brunanburh* in privileging generalized praise and ideology over detailed narration. Formally, *Hǫfuðlausn* resembles *Ludwigslied* in the use of end-rhyme, which appears to be an innovation spanning several vernaculars at this approximate period. Such cosmopolitanism of literary impulses is fully congruent with the ethos of Æthelstan's court, which maintained lively contacts with the Carolingian empire,[36] and could well have formed part of the poetic acculturation that Egill transferred onwards to his work for Eiríkr.[37]

Eiríkr, exceptionally among the Scandinavian rulers of York, was not of the York–Dublin dynasty of Ívarr but rather of the Norwegian dynasty of Haraldr hárfagri.[38] That notwithstanding, *Hǫfuðlausn* has evident links with poems composed for rulers in the line of Ívarr. The use of the distinctive phrase 'vefr darraðar' [weaving of the pennant/spear][39] suggests some kind of relationship to the anonymous *Darraðarljóð*, where the identical line occurs several times as part of the refrain (*stef*). The relationship might be one of indebtedness, if *Darraðarljóð* is an early tenth-century production commemorating the Battle of Dublin,[40] which is standardly dated to 919. Alternatively, it might be one of influence, if, as stated in *Njáls saga*,[41] *Darraðarljóð* commemorates the Battle of Clontarf, standardly dated to 1014. The motif 'vefr darraðar' is itself linked to an Irish memorial poem composed about 909, which features an image of war as weaving.[42] A clear case of a York–Dublin composition influenced by

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32 Hines, 'Egill's *Hǫfuðlausn*', pp. 85–6.
33 *NEL*, pp. 31–3, and Hofmann, 'Reimwort *gjǫr*'; Poole, 'Variants and Variability', p. 103.
34 St. 12: *ÍF* 2, p. 190; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 39, BI, p. 32.
35 Godman (ed. and trans.), *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, pp. 186–91.
36 Dumville, *Wessex and England*, p. 149.
37 Poole, 'Non enim possum'.
38 Townend, 'Whatever Happened', p. 60.
39 St. 5/2: *ÍF* 2, p. 187; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 36, BI, p. 31.
40 Kershaw (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems*, p. 116; Poole, *Viking Poems*, pp. 122–4.
41 Sveinsson (ed.), *Brennu-Njáls saga*, pp. 454–9.
42 Kershaw (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems*, p. 117; Poole, *Viking Poems*, p. 139.

Hǫfuðlausn is Gunnlaugr's *Sigtryggsdrápa*, which praises a member of Ívarr's lineage, Sigtryggr silkiskeggr, and, according to *Gunnlaugs saga*,[43] was delivered at Dublin. The *stef* of the two poems correspond closely in both form and content: Egill's 'bauð úlfum hræ / Eiríkr of sæ'[44] [Eiríkr gave the wolves carrion over the sea], with the notion that the corpses drift across the sea in the grip of currents and winds, is echoed by Gunnlaugr's 'Elr sváru skæ / Sigtryggr við hræ'[45] [Sigtryggr feeds the steed of the witch [wolf] with corpses].[46] These *stef*, comparably with those found elsewhere in the corpus, are a focus of ideology in their respective poems and figure prominently in the patterns of influence that can be traced down the line of skaldic poems. The analogy could be made with the faces of a coin, which are likewise an ultra-compact capsule of ideology that undergoes transmission, with variations, from minting to minting and in some instances from king to king.

Also important in establishing the existence of an active transmission of practices from poet to poet is the exordium (*upphaf*) and here again we can see Gunnlaugr taking his cue from Egill:

> Kank máls of skil,
> hvern mæra vil
> konungmanna kon,
> hann's Kvárans son;
> muna gramr við mik,
> venr gjǫfli sik,
> (þess mun grepp vara)
> gollhring spara.

[I know precisely which scion of kingly persons I intend to praise: he is the son of Kvarán. The king will not grudge me a gold ring. He is schooling himself to generosity; the poet suspects as much.][47]

> Segi hildingr mér
> ef hann heyri sér
> dýrligra brag;
> þat's drápulag.

[Let the king tell me if he hears a more exquisite poem; it is in *drápa* style.][48]

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43 Nordal and Jónsson (eds.), *Borgfirðinga sogur*, pp. 74–5.
44 St. 12/3–4: *ÍF* 2, p. 190; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 38, BI, p. 33.
45 St. 3: *ÍF* 3, p. 75; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 194, BI, p. 185.
46 *NEL*, p. 55; cf. Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediket*, p. 184; and Frank, 'King Cnut', p. 116.
47 St. 1: *ÍF* 3, p. 75; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 194, BI, p. 185.
48 St. 2: *ÍF* 3, p. 75; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 194, BI, p. 185.

This play on 'mál' [language, speech, case] and 'greppr' [poet/warrior] seems to have its specific antecedent in Egill's *Arinbjarnarkviða*:

> Emk hraðkvæðr
> hilmi at mæra,
> en glapmáll
> of gløggvinga,
> opinspjallr
> of jǫfurs dáðum,
> en þagmælskr
> of þjóðlygi.

[I am quick-spoken to praise a king but deficient of speech about misers, fluent in telling about the leader's acts and reticent about deceptions of the people.][49]

> Skaupi gnœgðr
> skrǫkberǫndum,
> emk vilkvæðr
> of vini mína;
> sótt hefk mǫrg
> mildinga sjǫt
> með grunlaust
> grepps of œði.

[Replete with scorn for bearers of falsehoods, I am gladly forthcoming about my friends. I have visited many residences of generous lords with a poet's fervour beyond suspicion.][50]

Continuities like these tend to encourage the hypothesis of an active and long-enduring practice of Anglo-Scandinavian praise poetry centred on York and Dublin, at least where links with English and Irish poetry are concerned. On the Norse side, we need to be cautious: it has to be borne in mind that Gunnlaugr could equally have drawn upon skaldic traditions maintained in Iceland, where he numbered Egill and other celebrated skalds among his kindred.

Sonatorrek, another Egill attribution, although not necessarily produced or performed in England, was apparently composed in close contact and perhaps even polemical exchange with English poems of the loosely elegiac or penitental type.[51] If we compare uses of the words 'bot' and 'betra' in *The Wanderer* (113) and *The Riming Poem* (81) with Egill's use of their cognates 'bœtr' [remedies; singular *bót*] and 'betra' [better] in *Sonatorrek*, we see that the

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49 St. 1: *ÍF* 2, p. 258; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 43, BI, p. 38.
50 St. 2: *ÍF* 2, p. 258; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 44, BI, p. 38.
51 Poole, 'Non enim possum'.

English poems characteristically present the 'remedy' supplied by the Christian God as having efficacy and the Christian afterlife in heaven as 'better', whereas Egill accredits these benefits to the heathen god Óðinn:

> þó hefr Míms vinr
> mér of fengnar
> bǫlva bœtr,
> ef et betra telk.

[yet the friend of Mímr [Óðinn] has bestowed on me recompenses for my injuries, if I reckon up the better [side].][52]

Egill's phrase 'Heljar bíða' [await Hel] in a subsequent stanza can most readily be accounted for as a defiant response to Christian expressions of faith in the face of impending death, seen for example in *The Wanderer*: 'Oft him anhaga are gebideð' [Often the solitary man experiences grace]:[53]

> Nú erum torvelt,
> Tveggja bága
> njǫrva nipt
> á nesi stendr;
> skalk þó glaðr
> með góðan vilja
> ok óhryggr
> Heljar bíða.

[Now things have turned against me, the constricting sister of Tveggi's foe [Hel, as sister of the Fenrisúlfr] stands on the headland; I must however await Hel gladly with goodwill and untroubled.][54]

The lexical item *n(j)ǫrva* [narrow] is not otherwise unequivocally attested in Norse and no doubt has been prompted by Old English *nearo* [narrow]; equally, the description of Hel as 'constricting' or 'narrow' has its closest counterparts in some applications of the synonymous Old English adjective *enge*.[55] The claim to be 'óhryggr' [untroubled] has a counterpart in etymon and theme in *The Wanderer*, where it is observed that a 'hreo hyge' [troubled mind] offers no help (line 16).[56] Such density of lexical reference suggests that Egill maintained lively contact and polemics with English poetry. It is as if he is resisting or reacting against the hegemonic Christian ideology as vigorously in

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52 St. 23: *ÍF* 2, p. 255; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 43, BI, p. 37.
53 Leslie (ed.), *Wanderer*, line 1.
54 St. 25: *ÍF* 2, p. 255; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 43, BI, p. 37.
55 *DOE*, s.v. enge 1 and 3.
56 De Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, s.v. hryggr 2.

Sonatorrek as he does in *Hǫfuðlausn*, which John Hines finds a startling assertion of ancestral Scandinavian beliefs and values in a region of England where 'assimilation between invader and native had been going on for several generations'.[57] Dialogues and ripostes of the kind posited here are typical of skaldic poetry[58] and sometimes, as in the present instance, afford evidence of poetic traditions and practices crossing the language divide.

The tenth-century Icelandic skald Glúmr Geirason was another composer of praise poetry for Eiríkr, as also for Eiríkr's son Haraldr gráfeldr. Like his patrons, he may have been a Christian or at least *prímsigndr* (a catechumen); on Haraldr's behalf he engaged in polemics against Eyvindr skaldaspillir, a devoted supporter of Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri in the years of that king's apostasy. There is no direct testimony that Glúmr resided in England,[59] but the awareness of English poetics shown by the following stanza from his *Gráfeldardrápa* gives the notion substantial support.

> Dolgeisu rak dísar,
> drótt kom mǫrg á flótta,
> gumna vinr at gamni
> gjóðum, írskar þjóðir.
> Foldar rauð ok felldi
> Freyr í manna dreyra
> sunnr, á sigr of hlynninn,
> seggi mækis eggjar.

[The friend of men pursued the Irish people, to the delight of the ospreys of the valkyrie of the wound-embers [ravens]. Many a war-band took flight. The Freyr of the land [ruler], with a penchant for victory, reddened the edges of the sword in men's blood and laid men low.][60]

Among the English features of this stanza are 'gumna vinr' [friend of men] (cf. *Beowulf*, 'goldwine gumena' [gold-friend of men], 1171, 1476, 1602);[61] 'í manna dreyra' [in men's blood] (cf. *Beowulf*, 'secga swate', 13); 'mækis eggjar' [edges of the sword] (cf. *Brunanburh*, 'sweorda ecgum', 4, 68; *Beowulf*, 'meces ecgum', 2614, 2939, 'billes ecgum', 2485, 'ecgum sweorda', 2961) and 'at gamni gjóðum' [at the pleasure of the ospreys [ravens]]' (cf. *Beowulf*, 'fuglum to gamene', 2941). Also foreign to skaldic idiom is the kenning 'Foldar . . . Freyr'

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57 Hines, 'Egill's *Hǫfuðlausn*', p. 99.
58 Von See, 'Polemische Zitate'.
59 Townend, 'Whatever Happened', pp. 54–5.
60 St. 2: Aðalbjarnarson (ed.), *Heimskringla*, vol. 26 (henceforward *ÍF* 26), p. 156; cf. *Skj*, AI, pp. 75–6, BI, p. 66.
61 *NEL*, p. 95.

[god of the land, i.e., king]. The Old English cognate of Freyr, *frea*, a common noun meaning 'lord' frequently used in Old English poetry (e.g., *Maldon*, 11, 15, 181, 255, 288), may have cued Glúmr in his choice of lexis.

Glúmr's sole attested encomium for Eiríkr, the *Eiríksdrápa*, survives only in fragmentary form:

> Brandr fær logs ok landa / lands Eiríki banda.

[The sword gains for Eiríkr the fire of the bands of the land [= gold] and lands.][62]

There is no information as to where the poem was performed but the present tense implies that the king is still alive, placing delivery of the poem in the early 950s at latest.[63] We can take the fragment to be a *stef*.[64] It centres on the internally rhymed verbal collocation 'lands': 'banda' [of the land: of bands]. Here the word 'banda' (nominative plural *bǫnd*) is used in a neutral fashion to signify 'bands, ties'. The same collocation recurs in later tenth- and early eleventh-century poems attributed to Einarr skálaglamm, Eilífr Goðrúnarson and Eyjólfr dáðaskald that address themselves to the instigators of Norwegian 'heathen' reaction against Christianization. These skalds use the word *bǫnd* differently from Glúmr, in the sense of '[heathen] gods, as binding/fettering powers'; these ancestral gods are credited with the rulers' power over territory.[65] In Eyjólfr's poem this key ideologeme is placed in the *stef*, the most prominent position available. Only Glúmr lies outside this ideological pattern: we might infer that in a context of polemics between the old and new religions and styles of leadership he had chosen to avoid un-Christian sentiments. That would be appropriate for a poet operating with a partially Anglicized and Christianized audience.

Also evidently part of a debate between religions was the anonymous *Eiríksmál*. According to the historical compilation *Fagrskinna*, this memorial poem for Eiríkr blóðøx was composed after the king's death at the behest of his wife Gunnhildr; it is conventionally dated to 954 or shortly thereafter. Hofmann detects extensive English influence on the diction:[66] the most

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62 St. 1: *Skj*, AI, p. 75, BI, p. 65.
63 Jesch, 'Skaldic Verse', p. 317.
64 Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediket*, pp. 185–6.
65 Examples are Einarr skálaglamm, *Vellekla*, st. 8 (*ÍF* 26, p. 210; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 124, BI, p. 118) and st. 14 (*ÍF* 26, pp. 241–2; cf. *Skj*, AI, pp. 125–6, BI, p. 119); Eilífr Goðrúnarson, fragment 3 (Poole, 'Adverbial Genitives', pp. 124–8; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 152, BI, p. 144); and Eyjólfr dáðaskald, *Bandadrápa*, st. 2 (*ÍF* 26, p. 250; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 200, BI, p. 191).
66 *NEL*, pp. 42–52; though contrast McKinnell, 'Eddic Poetry', p. 327.

significant items are 'bekkþili' [bench-planks: OE *bencþelu*], 'vel . . . kominn' [welcome: cf. OE *wilcuman*], hǫll [hall: OE *heall*] and 'vel hvat' [everything: OE *welhwæt*]. The first three relate, as Hofmann notes, to the amenities of the hall, an environment in which a great deal of Anglo-Scandinavian acculturation must have gone on. It seems reasonable to assume, with Townend, that the poet had known the king and been part of his court in York during Eiríkr and Gunnhildr's residence in Northumbria.[67] None of that, however, precluded him from conjuring up a 'heathen' scenario, where the valkyries under the aegis of Óðinn and other gods welcome Eiríkr to their hall.

There is then a very long gap of some eighty years before our final candidate example of York-based poetry, the *Valþjófsflokkr* of Thorkell Skallason. The poem commemorates Earl Waltheof, who was beheaded by William the Conqueror in 1076.[68] Þorkell, of unknown ethnicity,[69] identifies himself as a follower of this English aristocrat. The extent of Waltheof's land-holdings, from Northumbria to the south-east midlands, makes it difficult to pin down a place of composition or delivery of the poem,[70] though Durham is an intriguing possibility.[71] The fact that Sveinn Úlfsson of Denmark supported Waltheof in a revolt against William opens the possibility that Þorkell had an audience in Denmark as well.

London

Among the second group of poems, those whose production and delivery were evidently based on London or Winchester, the prize example is the anonymous *Liðsmannaflokkr*, which praises the military leadership of Cnut and his ally Thorkell the Tall (Þorkell inn hávi) in 1015–16. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle account *s.a.* 1016 states that the invading army brought their ships into London and over-wintered there.[72] The poet, who might conjecturally be identified as Sigvatr's father Þórðr Sigvaldaskald, must have been addressing a heterogeneous audience. The presence of Danes and Swedes among Thorkell's and Cnut's followings is vouched for by runic and other documentary evidence.[73] Linguistic evidence internal to the poem is consistent with a

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67 Townend, 'Whatever Happened', pp. 52–4.
68 Scott, 'Valþjófr Jarl', p. 79.
69 Ross, 'Poets and Ethnicity', p. 185.
70 Parsons, 'Scandinavian Language', p. 307.
71 Jesch, 'Skaldic Verse', pp. 322–3.
72 MS E, in Plummer (ed.), *Two of the Saxon Chronicles*, vol. 1, p. 153.
73 Whitelock, 'Scandinavian Personal Names', pp. 137–9; Sawyer, *Age of the Vikings*, pp. 5–6.

mixed Anglo-Scandinavian milieu. An element of East Norse usage is apparent – 'blá' [st. 5/6; coarse linen fibre] is represented in Old East Norse but not in Old West Norse – alongside some Norwegian references.[74] Among the poet's Anglo-Saxonisms, the word 'skreiðask' [st.2/8; creep] is a rationalization of *skréðask [clothe, adorn oneself][75] and the name form 'Ullkell', used for standard *Ulfkell* in internal rhyme with 'gullu' (st. 6/2), is consistent with a later Old English phonological development where the consonant cluster [lfC] was sporadically reduced.[76]

The events of the campaign are recounted from the viewpoint of rank-and-file members of the militia. As if acknowledging an element in the audience with mixed allegiances, the poet gives special recognition to Ulfkell (Ulfcetel), the East Anglian magnate whose vigorous defence threw the *liðsmenn* into temporary disarray.[77] Just possibly, a confluence of Norse and English poetic tradition has led to the curious expression 'skeggja byggs brunns' [st. 6/7–8; inhabitant of the barley of the spring], referring to Ulfcetel. The structure is that of a kenning where 'barley of the spring' means 'stone'. London boasted stone walls dating from the Romans, making it quite realistic for Ulfcetel to be depicted as occupying a stone fortification, a motif that is complemented by reference to a stone-dwelling woman, possibly Emma of Normandy (st. 8/4).[78] Normally in skaldic usage, however, such a kenning would apply to giants, as archetypal dwellers in (or on) rocks and mountains. At work here may be a whimsical allusion to English representations of stone structures as 'eald enta geweorc' [ancient works of giants] found in descriptions of ruined cities in *The Wanderer* (87a) and *The Ruin* (2b) and of Roman buildings and roads in *Andreas* (1235a and 1495a respectively), as well as elsewhere[79]– a tradition about the legendary past of Britain that could have formed part of a skald's familiarization with his leader's newly occupied prestige centre.

Another poem delivered in England to the king's personal bodyguards or troops, in this case termed the 'þingamenn',[80] is Þórðr Kolbeinsson's *Eiríksdrápa* in praise of Earl Eiríkr, Cnut's brother-in-law. Its handling of the Ulfcetel part of the story suggests that the poet was seeking to appeal to a different, rather more triumphalist, sector of the community:[81]

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74 Poole, 'Skaldic Verse', p. 286; the poem is edited in Poole, *Viking Poems*, pp. 86–90.
75 *NEL*, pp. 64–70.
76 Poole, 'Skaldic Verse', pp. 284–5.
77 *Ibid*., p. 288.
78 *Ibid*.
79 Frankis, 'Thematic Significance'.
80 Poole, 'Skaldic Verse', pp. 270–1; cf. Frank, 'King Cnut', p. 108.
81 Jesch, 'Skaldic Verse', p. 318.

Fekk – regn Þorins rekka
rann of þingamǫnnum –
ýglig hǫgg, þars eggjar
Ulfkell, báar skulfu.

[Ulfkell received frightful blows, where the dark blades quivered; the rain of the dwarf's comrades [poem] ran over the household retainers.][82]

A third poem possibly delivered in London at Cnut's court[83] is Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Knútsdrápa*, datable to the 1020s. Sigvatr, like Þórðr Sigvaldaskáld before him, had spent a significant amount of time in England, chiefly in association with Óláfr Haraldsson (later to become king of Norway) but also with Cnut, and the *drápa* contains several pointers to English influence. The circumlocution for 'leader', 'Dana hlífskjǫldr' [protective shield of the Danes],[84] is of a type that occurs frequently in Old English but not in Old Norse, parallel to Egill's 'folkhagi'.[85] The sense of 'meta' [measure (one's way)], as a circumlocution for 'go',[86] is characteristic of Old English poetry but does not occur in Old Norse.[87] Old Norse 'slá' in the sense 'kill, slay'[88] may reflect semantic influence from cognate Old English *slean*.[89] The verse-form is *tøglag*, which may have evolved in England.[90] A close parallel between stanza 2 of this poem and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle *s.a.* 1017, pointed out by Hofmann,[91] suggests that identical stories were being told across the language divide, perhaps in a form of official record:

Ok senn sonu
sló, hvern ok þó,
Aðalráðs eða
út flæmði Knútr.

[And Cnut soon defeated or drove out the sons of Æthelred – and each one [of them], though.][92]

82 St. 14: Poole, 'Skaldic Verse', pp. 270–1; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 216; BI, p. 206; and Aðalbjarnarson (ed.), *Heimskringla*, vol. 27 (henceforward *ÍF* 27), p. 32.
83 Jesch, 'Skaldic Verse', p. 318.
84 St. 9/6–7: *ÍF* 27, p. 278; Einarsson (ed.), *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sogum* (henceforward *ÍF* 29), p. 186; cf. *Skj*, AI, pp. 250–1, BI, p. 234.
85 *NEL*, p. 92.
86 St. 11: *ÍF* 29, p. 205; Guðnason (ed.), *Danakonunga sǫgur* (henceforward *ÍF* 35), p. 123; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 251, BI, p. 234.
87 *NEL*, p. 93.
88 St. 2: *ÍF* 35, p. 120; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 248, BI, p. 232.
89 *NEL*, p. 88.
90 *Ibid.*, p. 93.
91 *Ibid.*, pp. 88–90.
92 St. 2: *ÍF* 27, p. 33; *ÍF* 35, p. 120; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 248, BI, p. 232.

7 Cnut cyning afly<m>de ut Eadwig æþeling 7 eft hine het ofslean.

[And King Cnut expelled Eadwig the prince and then ordered that he be killed.][93]

Occasional sentiments of Sigvatr's might seem to us to be offensively triumphalist, to smack of reviving old hostilities, and to that extent safest rehearsed in the company of people who identified with Scandinavia rather than England:

> Ok Ellu bak,
> at, lét, hinns sat,
> Ívarr ara,
> Jórvík, skorit.

[And Ívarr, who resided at York, had the back of Ælla cut with an eagle.][94]

And yet one cannot be categorical on such a point, when England was itself scarcely a unified nation. Complex questions of a kindred sort are raised by the honorifics in this *drápa*, which focus, as Roberta Frank has observed, on the king's rule over Denmark rather than over England.[95] Assuring his audience that Cnut has spared the Danes from extensive plundering, Sigvatr refers to the king as 'jǫfurr Jótlands' [king of Jutland].[96] The same interest in Jutland can be detected elsewhere in the poem:

> Þurðu norðan
> – namsk þat – með gram
> til slétts svalir
> Silunds kilir.

[Chilly keels sped with the king from the north to flat *Sillende*; that has been learnt.][97]

Here I equate 'Silunds' (genitive case) with Old English *Sillende*, Old Frankish *Sinlendi*, a place name that denotes the region of southern Jutland immediately north of Angeln, sometimes termed North Schleswig.[98] In skaldic scholarship Sigvatr's 'Silund' has been accounted for as a by-form of *Selund* [Sjælland/Zealand],[99] but this feminine-gender word could not have had inflection in *-s*; we should instead reconstruct a form **Síland*

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93 O'Brien O'Keeffe (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS C*, p. 103.
94 St. 1: *Skj*, AI, p. 248, BI, p. 232.
95 Frank, 'King Cnut', p. 109.
96 St. 9/1–3: *ÍF* 27, p. 278; *ÍF* 29, p. 186; cf. *Skj*, AI, pp. 250–1, BI, p. 234.
97 St. 4: *ÍF* 27, p. 270, *ÍF* 29, p. 184; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 249, BI, p. 233.
98 Lund (ed.) and Fell (trans.), *Two Voyagers*, p. 67.
99 Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum*, *s.v.* Selund.

(neuter) or similar as the place name intended by Sigvatr. Jutland was the base for the Jelling dynasty, which attempted to exercise power over all Denmark,[100] and references to this territorial core on Sigvatr's part might indeed have appealed to Danes in the militia whose investment was in their homeland, not England. But it needs to be noted that concomitantly the ethnic designation *Jótar* could be understood as pertaining to a section of southern English people. Traditions transmitted by Bede (*HE*, I.15) and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (*s.a.* 449) mention the Jutes (*Eote*) as primal invaders of Britain who settled in Kent and the Isle of Wight. Their history would have held special relevance for skalds addressing audiences in southern England, perhaps especially at the ecclesiastical prestige centre of Canterbury, which figured actively in Cnut's political calculations. As part of the skalds' necessary familiarization they would have gathered that in effect Cnut was ruling over Jutes in both countries.

The *Knútsdrápa* of Óttarr svarti, Sigvatr's nephew, probably datable to *c.* 1027[101] and possibly intended for delivery in England,[102] continues the pattern of allusions to the Jutes.[103] Óttarr tends to use the couplet rather than the full half-stanza as a sentence-boundary, like Egill in his *Aðalsteinsdrápa*, and this could be interpreted as a concession to a less than totally fluent audience:[104]

> Ætt drap Jóta dróttinn
> Játgeirs í fǫr þeiri.

[The lord of the Jótar [Cnut] slew the family of Edgar on that expedition.][105]

The naming of Edgar (r. 959–75), whose patronage at court included Scandinavians,[106] testifies to the poet's informed knowledge of the royal house of Wessex, which is also on display in the following couplet:

> Játmundar hlaut undir
> ættniðr gǫfugr hættar.

[The noble descendant of Edmund [= Edmund Ironside] received dangerous wounds.][107]

100 Dobat, 'State', p. 73.
101 Frank, 'King Cnut', p. 113.
102 Jesch, 'Skaldic Verse', p. 318.
103 Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*', pp. 157–61.
104 Frank, 'King Cnut', p. 109.
105 St. 3/5–6: *ÍF* 35, p. 104; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 297, BI, p. 273.
106 Townend, 'Pre-Cnut Praise-Poetry', p. 356.
107 St. 7/5–6: *ÍF* 35, p. 112; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 297, BI, p. 274.

Edmund Ironside was the descendant of the tenth-century Edmund, brother of Æthelstan, celebrated in *Brunanburh*, and in this allusion Óttarr combines an awareness of Wessex genealogy with a certain wit by naming one Edmund in reference to another. Although the treatment of the English defeat is triumphalist, the skald, like the author of *Liðsmannaflokkr*, can still recognize individual excellence on the English side; no doubt this was a function of calculations concerning an audience with mixed ties and allegiances.

More marginal as a candidate for status as an Anglo-Scandinavian production is Þórarinn loftunga's *Tøgdrápa*, which dates from the late 1020s. The use of the adverb 'þinig' [there], meaning 'to Norway',[108] suggests that the poem was not composed or recited in Norway itself; possibly it was recited in London or Winchester but a royal court in Denmark remains a possibility. The phrase 'vinr minn' [st. 1/4; my friend] has been regarded as an indicator of Old English influence, with such parallels as 'wine mīn' in *Beowulf* (457, 1704), but the case is hardly a strong one.[109]

With some of this poetry, then, we can look with a measure of confidence to occasions of composition and performance in England before an Anglo-Scandinavian audience. By contrast, Sigvatr's *Nesjavísur*, in praise of the accession of Óláfr Haraldsson to the kingship of Norway in 1017, appears to have been calculated primarily for delivery in Norway. There too, however, we are talking about a mixed audience: some of the new king's entourage had spent many years in England and there are also likely to have been English clerics and court officials in attendance.[110] Some of the vocabulary has a distinctly English flavour:

> Fekk meira lið miklu
> mildr en gløggr til hildar,
> hirð þás hugði forðask
> heið þjóðkonungs reiði,
> en vinlausum vísa
> varð, þeim es fé sparði –
> háðisk víg fyr víðum
> vangi – þunnt of stangir.

[The generous man [Óláfr] received a much larger force for the battle than the niggardly one [Sveinn] when the illustrious war-band thought to escape the king of the nation's anger, whereas for the friendless leader, who stinted on

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108 St. 1: *ÍF* 29, pp. 191–2; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 322, BI, p. 298.
109 *NEL*, pp. 94–5.
110 Krag, 'Early Unification of Norway', p. 194.

payment, it became sparse around the standards. War was waged off the broad coastland.][111]

This stanza contains the earliest attestation of the word 'hirð' [war-band], a term which derives from Old English *hīred* [household, band of retainers][112] and which was most probably brought to Norway by Óláfr.[113] Similar may be the case of 'þjóðkonungs' [of the nation's king]: although this word occurs in purportedly earlier skaldic poetry, Sigvatr's usage is likely to have been reinforced by Old English *þeodcyning*.[114]

From the English side, the main candidate for Anglo-Scandinavian contact is the anonymous fragment editorially entitled *The Battle of Maldon*. Although difficult to date, the poem contains south-eastern dialect forms[115] and therefore might have been composed and performed locally. Among the lexical items advanced as potential evidence for contact with Norse speakers are 'eorl' (6, 28, 51, 89, 133, 146, 159, 165, 203, 233), 'garræs' (32), 'hilde dælan' (33), 'grið' (35), 'syllan . . . sylfra dōm' (38), 'ceallian' (91) and 'dreng' (149).[116] In a notably conservative recent assessment, Sara Pons-Sanz counters that only 'ceallian', 'dreng', 'eorl' and 'grið' warrant serious consideration[117] and that even these instances may reflect prior integration of Norse-derived items into Old English dialects or technolects.[118] This is justifiable caution, but might be somewhat overstated: while 'ceallian' might conceivably represent a revival of the earlier Old English noun *calla*, the immediate influence is surely the very common Old Norse verb *kalla*,[119] which has plenty of attestations relating to martial contexts. On 'dreng', Jesch suggests that the English poet may have selected this word to characterize the warriors on the other side 'because the English were so used to hearing their viking opponents urging each other on using the term *drengr*'.[120] Also, the one attestation of Norse *geirrás*, corresponding to Old English 'garræs', is in Einarr skálaglamm's *Vellekla*,[121] which originates in the 980s, perhaps only a decade or so prior to *Maldon*, leaving open the inference that some kind of Norse–English contact underlies these two attestations. The dialogue between Byrhtnoth and the Viking messenger

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111 St. 2: Poole, '*Nesjavísur*', p. 174; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 228, BI, p. 217.
112 De Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, pp. 228–9.
113 *NEL*, pp. 57, 83.
114 *Ibid*., p. 83.
115 Wenisch, 'Sächsische Dialektwörter', p. 203.
116 E.g., by Robinson, 'God, Death, and Loyalty'.
117 Pons-Sanz, 'Norse-Derived Terms', p. 439.
118 *Ibid*., p. 444.
119 *NEL*, p. 195; contrast Dance, '*Battle of Maldon*'.
120 Jesch, *Ships and Men*, p. 217.
121 St. 28: *ÍF* 26, pp. 257–8; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 129, BI, p. 122.

in *Maldon* is no doubt a stylization of actual parleys or harangues between English and Vikings.[122] Such dialogue, though rarely conveyed in direct speech in skaldic poetry, also occurs in Eyvindr skáldaspillir's description of the Battle of Fitjar, datable to 961 or shortly thereafter.[123]

A number of candidate Anglo-Scandinavian texts pick up on a specific Anglo-Saxon ideologeme, the proximity of the earthly ruler to God. Gunnlaugr's *Aðalráðsdrápa*, a poem in praise of Æthelred, occupies a key place among them. The surviving fragment, with its use of present tense, probably belongs to the *stef*:

> Herr sésk allr inn ǫrva
> Englands sem goð þengil;
> ætt lýtr grams ok gumna
> gunnbráðs Aðalráði.

[All the army holds the munificent king of England in the same awe as they do God. The kindred of the battle-prompt king and of men venerates Aðalráðr.][124]

As argued by Jesch, the *drápa* is likely to be authentic and to have been designed for performance in England.[125] The reference to the king's personal kindred ('ætt . . . grams') can best be understood as a topically driven denial that any rebellious feelings are being nurtured among Æthelred's sons – though in fact Edmund Ironside was to go into open rebellion against his father at approximately this time.[126] Equally, it is asserted that the English people as a whole ('ætt . . . gumna') maintain their loyalty to Æthelred. In thus proclaiming the subjecthood of an entire populace to the king,[127] *Aðalráðsdrápa* appears to hark back to Egill's *Aðalsteinsdrápa*. The association of God and king shows influence from Anglo-Saxon royal ideology.[128]

If anything, Cnut appears to have emphasized his special status as a Christian king even more strongly than Æthelred had, no doubt in order to allay English grievances about the earlier part of his career. Accordingly, a series of skaldic poems subsequent to Gunnlaugr puts Cnut on the same God-like footing as Æthelred. The *stef* in these poems has a particular importance in carrying this ideologeme, as we shall see.[129] Complementarily, in Cnut's coinage in Denmark, one of the three dominant types is an imitation of

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122 Blake, 'Flyting', p. 244.
123 *Lausavísur*, 3 and 4: *ÍF* 26, p. 189; *ÍF* 29, pp. 87, 90; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 72, BI, p. 63.
124 St. 1: *ÍF* 3, p. 71; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 194, BI, p. 184.
125 Jesch, 'Skaldic Verse', p. 317; contrast Parsons, 'Scandinavian Language', p. 307.
126 Poole, 'Skaldic Verse', pp. 294–5.
127 *NEL*, pp. 25–6, 54–5.
128 Fidjestøl, 'Pagan Beliefs', pp. 100–20, 106, 118–19.
129 Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediket*, p. 190.

Æthelred's last type, the Small Cross, which features a royal bust on one side and a cross on the other, thus emblematizing the proximity of king and God.[130] Hallvarðr háreksblesi's *Knútsdrápa* exemplifies this theme. The poem has a substantial focus on English events and contains indications of having been designed for performance in England rather than Scandinavia,[131] though the evidence is somewhat equivocal.

> Esat und jarðar hǫslu,
> orðbrjótr Dǫnum forðar
> moldreks, munka valdi
> mæringr an þú næri.

[There is no prince under the earth-hazel [World Tree] closer to the ruler of monks [God] than you; the breaker of the soil-ruler's [giant's] words [gold] protects Danes.][132]

The mention of monks here is no doubt motivated by current politics. Cnut made numerous well-publicized benefactions to monasteries, as to the Church more generally. To Christ Church Canterbury, he presented the port of Sandwich in atonement for the death of Archbishop Ælfheah.[133] As a memorial at Assandun, site of the culminating battle in his 1016 campaign, he built a *mynster*, attending the consecration service in person, in company with Archbishop Wulfstan of York and other ecclesiastical and monastic personages.[134] The theme of proximity to God is enunciated again in the *stef*:[135]

> Knútr verr jǫrð sem ítran
> alls dróttinn sal fjalla.

[Cnut defends the land as the Lord of all does the splendid hall of the mountains [heaven].][136]

Comparable with Hallvarðr's lines is the sole surviving fragment, probably also a *stef*, or part of one, from Þórarinn loftunga's *Hǫfuðlausn*, a poem in praise of Cnut datable to *c*. 1027–8:[137]

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130 Malmer, *King Canute's Coinage*, p. 9.
131 *NEL*, p. 97; cf. Jesch, 'Knútr', p. 248, and 'Skaldic Verse', pp. 317–18.
132 St. 7: *Skj*, AI, p. 318, BI, p. 294. Cf. Frank, 'King Cnut', p. 121; and Jesch, 'Knútr', p. 248.
133 Garmonsway, *Cnut*, p. 26.
134 Rodwell, 'Battle of Assandun', pp. 142–3.
135 Jesch, 'Knútr', p. 248.
136 St. 8: *Skj*, AI, p. 318, BI, p. 294. Cf. Frank, 'King Cnut', p. 121; and Jesch, 'Knútr', p. 248.
137 Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*', p. 157; *NEL*, p. 96; Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediket*, pp. 125, 185; Jesch, 'Knútr', p. 249, and 'Skaldic Verse', p. 318.

> Knútr verr grund sem gætir
> Gríklands himinríki.[138]

[Cnut defends the land as the guardian of Byzantium [God] [defends] the heavenly kingdom.]

Here the compound 'himinríki' is an adaptation from Old English *heofonrice*.[139]

Not (so far as we can tell) a *stef* but expressing the same idea is this virtuoso characterization of Cnut in Sigvatr's *Knútsdrápa*:

> kærr keisara,
> klúss Pétrúsi.

[dear to the Emperor, close to Peter.][140]

Here the pope is represented as Peter: on the authority of John 21:15–17, St Peter was regarded as the shepherd of the apostolic flock and hence as a model for any earthly king or emperor who truly cared for his people and wished to live up to his role as *imago Christi*. Cnut's pilgrimage to Rome in 1027 was made in part so as to attend the coronation of Conrad II, the Holy Roman Emperor, whose frontiers bordered those of Denmark, and in his Letter from Rome the king cites the benefits to his subjects from his newly cemented friendship with both emperor and pope.[141]

Among the skalds, Sigvatr would have had special exposure to political guidance stemming from the homilies and other writings of Ælfric and Wulfstan, who enjoyed privileged access to not merely Anglo-Saxon but also Anglo-Scandinavian aristocratic and royal circles.[142] The characteristic admonitory tone of these ecclesiastical mentors is emulated in his polemical verses against Danish agents working for Cnut in Norway.[143]

> Fjandr ganga þar þengils,
> þjóð býðr opt, með sjóða,
> hǫfgan malm fyr hilmis
> haus ófalan, lausa;
> sitt veit hverr, ef harra
> hollan selr við golli

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138 St. 1: *Skj*, AI, p. 322, BI, p. 298.
139 Fischer, *Lehnwörter des Altwestnordischen*, p. 5.
140 St. 10: *ÍF* 29, p. 205; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 251, BI, p. 234.
141 Garmonsway, *Cnut*, p. 25; cf. Frank, 'King Cnut', p. 118.
142 Klein, 'Beauty', pp. 79–80; Lawson, 'Archbishop Wulfstan', p. 577; cf. Wulfstan, *Sermo Lupi*, p. 16 and references there given.
143 For a full discussion, see Fidjestøl, 'Kongetruskap og gullets makt'.

> (vert es slíks) í svǫrtu,
> sinn, helvíti innan.

[The enemies of the king go there with loose purses; people often offer heavy metal for the head of the leader, which is not for sale; each knows his [reward] inside in black hell-punishment, if he sells his faithful lord in exchange for gold. It is deserving of such.][144]

> Kaup varð daprt, þars djúpan,
> dróttinrœkð, of sóttu
> þeir es, heim, á himnum,
> hás elds, svikum beldu.

[The reward in heaven was dismal, where they who ventured on betrayal of a lord with acts of treachery sought the deep home of high flame.][145]

These verses appear to draw their leading ideas from English sources. Ælfric's sermon *De initio creaturae* describes Lucifer's descent into 'helle wite' and makes much of the notion of betrayal of God and Christ;[146] a text such as this could well have prompted Sigvatr's use of the Anglo-Saxonism 'helvíti' [hell torment, or simply hell]. Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi* (1014) specifically condemns 'hlafordswice' [treachery / treason against one's lord].[147] In the peroration a call for loyalty is immediately followed by an evocation of the Last Judgement, much as we see in Sigvatr's verses:

utan word and weorc rihtlice fadian, and ure ingeþanc clænsian georne, ond að ond wed wærlice healdan, and sume getrywða habban us betweonan butan uncræftan; ond utan gelome understandan þone miclan dom þe we ealle to sculon, and beorgan us georne wið þone weallendan bryne helle wites . . .

[and let us order our words and deeds rightfully, and cleanse our inward thoughts earnestly, and faithfully keep to oath and pledge, and have some loyalty between us without deceit; and let us constantly bear in mind the great judgement that we must all come before, and save ourselves earnestly from the surging fire of hell-torment . . .][148]

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144 *Lausavísa* 13: *ÍF* 27, pp. 294–5; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 270, BI, p. 250.
145 *Lausavísa* 14: *ÍF* 27, p. 295; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 270, BI, p. 250.
146 Fox, 'Ælfric', p. 177.
147 Wulfstan, *Sermo Lupi*, pp. 30, 31–2, 42; cf. Robinson, 'God, Death, and Loyalty', p. 119.
148 Wulfstan, *Sermo Lupi*, p. 42.

A departure from purely Insular influences is marked by Þórarinn loftunga's *Glælognskviða*, which dates from around 1032 and is addressed to Sveinn Álfífuson and others in an Anglo-Scandinavian audience.[149] Composed in advocacy of Óláfr's sainthood,[150] the poem contains some apparently new ecclesiastical vocabulary. Adoptions from Old English include 'bjalla' [bell],[151] 'hringjask' [ring][152] and 'sálu' [soul];[153] 'bók' in the sense of 'book' is a semantic adaptation based on Old English.[154] The expression 'mál bóka' [language of books, i.e., Latin] (compare OE *boclæden*) is our first attested reference to that language in the skaldic corpus. By contrast, 'klokka' [bell],[155] 'altári' [altar][156] and 'kerti' [candle][157] are probably mediated via Old Saxon or Old High German from Latin origins, and *synð*, in 'synðalauss' [sinless], is probably from Old Saxon.[158] The poet's innovative mixing of English and Norse lexis so as to describe an unfamiliar item of ecclesiastical or scribal paraphernalia can be seen in the following stanza fragment:

> þás þú rekr
> fyr reginnagla
> bóka máls
> bœnir þínar.

[when you recite your prayers before the mighty nail [pointer] of the language of books [Latin].][159]

The *reginnagli* [mighty nail] will be the manuscript pointer or marker used to guide the reader in recitation from the service-book,[160] akin to the *baculi cantorum* recorded in medieval inventories[161] and probably a valuable item in its own right, as would befit the splendour of Óláfr's shrine.

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149 Townend, 'Knútr', pp. 261–2.
150 Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediket*, p. 126; Townend, 'Knútr', p. 261.
151 St. 6/2: *ÍF* 27, p. 407; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 326, BI, p. 301; de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, p. 38.
152 St. 6/4: de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, p. 256: hringja 3.
153 St. 7/8: *ÍF* 27, p. 408; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 326, BI, p. 301; de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, p. 460.
154 St. 10/7: *ÍF* 27, p. 408; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 327, BI, p. 301; de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, p. 48: bók 2.
155 St. 6/7: de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, p. 318.
156 St. 7/2: Halldórsson, 'Some Old Saxon Loanwords', pp. 112–14.
157 St. 7/4: *ibid*., pp. 114–16.
158 St. 7/7: Halldórsson, '*Sýnð* – An Old Saxon Loanword', pp. 60–4.
159 St. 10: *ÍF* 27, p. 408; cf. *Skj*, AI, p. 327, BI, p. 301.
160 For earlier attempts to explain this expression, see Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum*, p. 460, *s.v* reginnagli; and *ÍF* 27, p. 408.
161 Cf. Hinton, *Catalogue*, p. 46.

Legendary texts

I now turn briefly to our evidence for the circulation of legendary texts in the various Anglo-Scandinavian milieux. We have already noted the allusions to the legendary past of the York–Dublin kingship, with the killing of Ella / Ælla as its most distinctive element. Possibly also localizable to the North is the legend of Vǫlundr. Clear evidence for knowledge of the Vǫlundr story in northern England can be found in monuments at York, Gosforth and Sockburn, which John McKinnell plausibly traces back to literary narrations.[162] The fact that the pictorial representations found in England significantly outnumber those found in Scandinavia makes it likely that we are dealing with a tradition principally maintained in England.[163] Within the surviving literary instantiation of this tradition, *Vǫlundarkviða*, a series of words or particular senses of words resists explanation other than in terms of Old English influence: 'alvitr' [alien being(s)]; 'gim' [gem]; 'lindbauga' [rings threaded on a bark-fibre rope]; 'bast' [rope made of bark-fibre]; *ljóði* in 'álfa ljóða' [member of the race of elves]; 'teygjaz' in the sense of either 'shows' (from Old English *teon* [to display]) or 'snaps' (compare Old English *togung* [spasm]); 'íviðgjarnra' [malicious] (compare Old English *inwit-*); 'barni aukin' [pregnant] (unique in Old Norse in this sense, but a common meaning of Old English *ēacen*); 'jarknasteina' [gems]; and probably 'níta' [to experience], not found elsewhere in Old Norse verse and perhaps borrowed from Old English *nyttian*, *nittian* [to possess, experience, have the use of].[164] If these linkages are sound, then clearly the impress of English on this Norse poem is greater than that exhibited by any other of the texts discussed in this chapter and it becomes a very strong candidate for status as an Anglo-Scandinavian production. Some special connectedness may have existed between the Old Norse *Vǫlundarkviða* and the Old English *Deor*. *Deor* is atypical of Old English poems in its stanzaic form and the two poems share some unusual vocabulary.[165] One could posit a 'community of interest' in this body of story material across the language demarcation.

It is tempting to situate *Beowulf* within a parallel 'community of interest', since, as is well known, it exhibits a triple thematic connectedness with Norse traditions, in the shape of story materials represented on the Norse side by *Grettis saga*, *Hrólfs saga kraka* and *Ynglinga saga*. But in the absence of decisive evidence for the date and provenance of *Beowulf*, and pending further work on

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162 McKinnell, 'Eddic Poetry', p. 329.
163 *Ibid.*, p. 333.
164 *Ibid.*, pp. 331–2; Dronke (ed.), *Poetic Edda*, pp. 277, 318.
165 Dronke (ed.), *Poetic Edda*, pp. 276–7.

Grettis saga analogues in Anglo-Latin writings,[166] this potential nexus is hard to evaluate and it remains possible that very much older traditions, pre-dating Anglo-Saxon and Viking contact and perhaps even the invasion of Britain, provide at least a portion of the story materials.

A more definite case for hybridization can be made in respect of the anonymous scriptural poem *Judith*. The narration of Holofernes' drunkenness at the feast, and helplessness in his 'burgeteld' [57, 248, 276; bower-tent], appears to be coloured by reminiscences of the Gothic Ermanaric/Eormenric/Jǫrmunrekkr, as described in *Deor* and *Hamðismál*, or the Hunnish Attila/Ætla/Atli, as described in *Atlakviða*, and therefore probably had counterparts in stories of these kings performed in tenth-century England, perhaps in the Danelaw.[167] Another legendary element is the phrase 'ides ælfscinu' [14; elf-bright lady], describing Judith. The compound *ælfscinu/-scieno*, as it occurs in *Judith* and *Genesis*, is explained in the *Dictionary of Old English* (*s.v.* ælfscyne) as 'radiant or fair as an elf, beautiful'; the compilers note that the word has also been understood as 'delusive as an elf' or 'divinely inspired'. It might be used in *Judith* to suggest the captivation of Holofernes by the beauty of the heroine.[168] The English poet was evidently allowing details to 'bleed in' from Scandinavian expressions of a folktale type that involved the undoing of a king by a bewitching maiden who has associations with elves or dwarves. Examples are the legend of King Haraldr hárfagri's seduction by Snjófríðr and King Helgi's by an unnamed elfin woman in *Hrólfs saga kraka*. Of a similar type is the story in *Ynglinga saga* describing how a Finnish woman called Skjálf avenges herself on the Swedish king Agni: lulled into incautiousness, he gets drunk and falls asleep in a tent ('landtjald') under a tree, from which Skjálf and her men then hang him.

The mention in the eleventh-century *Encomium Emmae reginae* of a magic raven banner belonging to the Danes points to the existence of a legend that might well have had a focus of circulation in Anglo-Scandinavian circles in the south of England. The unknown author of the *Encomium* seems to have gathered material from members of the Anglo-Scandinavian court in London and Winchester and may, as argued by Simon Keynes, have been resident in this region at the time of writing.[169]

Finally, the famous legend of Havelok the Dane, a supposed Anglo-Scandinavian king of England, is likely to have been cultivated in an enclave

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166 Andy Orchard, personal communication.
167 Cf. Frank, 'Germanic Legend', p. 94.
168 See A. Hall, *Elves*, pp. 89–93 and references there given.
169 Campbell (ed. and trans.), *Encomium Emmae reginae*, p. xl.

of Anglo-Scandinavian speakers located in Lincolnshire, though with its ultimate origins perhaps lying in Northumbria. The name of the hero appears to derive from that of the historical king Óláfr kvarán, who succeeded his father Sigtryggr as king of York around the year 925 and ruled intermittently until 949.[170] No Norse version of the story is extant – the sole witnesses are the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman *Lai d'Haveloc*, by Geffrei Gaimar, and the thirteenth-century Middle English *Havelok the Dane* – but the Scandinavian emphases of the content are unmistakable[171] and the extant texts are thought to go back ultimately to Anglo-Scandinavian narratives. The *Lai d'Haveloc* refers to aged people who preserve memories of Havelok's deeds.[172] Further testimony to oral dissemination of the story comes from a near-contemporary of the author of the Middle English version, Robert Mannyng of Brunne, a resident of Lincolnshire,[173] and from the town seal of Grimsby, where Havelok holds up to Goldeborw a large ring, above which is a crown,[174] emblematizing the lawfulness of his accession to power and implying the same for Cnut.[175] As pointed out by Thorlac Turville-Petre, the ideology that informs these narratives offers a counter to the chronicles, where Danes are presented as arrogant aliens and Cnut and his sons as foreign kings who owe their dominant position to English treachery.[176]

Conclusions

The texts surveyed in this chapter point to some kind of contact between the English and the Norse speech communities and have some measure of claim to be Anglo-Scandinavian productions. Often the contact may have been no greater than the adoption of scattered lexical items, sometimes as technical terms that filtered into ordinary usage within the language. Sometimes, too, the texts will have been designed for performance in Scandinavia rather than, or as well as, in England. In a small number of cases among our extant witnesses, we can reasonably suppose that the composition or treatment of the material took place in a fully Anglo-Scandinavian milieu. On such texts a

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170 Smithers (ed.), *Havelok the Dane*, pp. lv–lvi.
171 Turville-Petre, 'Representations of the Danelaw', p. 352.
172 Bradbury, 'Traditional Origins', pp. 123–4.
173 *Ibid*., p. 119.
174 Turville-Petre, 'Representations of the Danelaw', p. 354.
175 Smithers (ed.), *Havelok the Dane*, p. lvii.
176 Turville-Petre, 'Representations of the Danelaw', p. 348.

certain amount can be built, albeit speculatively. We can sense some of the challenges for the author in dealing with divided allegiances and conflicting ideologies among the audience. We can infer a process of dialogue between the Norse and English literary works, involving the transmission of not merely lexis and stylisms but also narrative, genealogy and ideology. We can gain an appreciation of how poetic structure, notably the *stef*, would have served to crystallize and clarify communication of key ideas across a mixed audience. And altogether we can appreciate the literary and linguistic skills of the poets working within and across these various communities so as to memorialize their leaders and celebrate their beliefs.

European literature and eleventh-century England

THOMAS O'DONNELL, MATTHEW TOWNEND
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Ælfric died in about 1010, Wulfstan in 1023. Byrhtferth of Ramsey had probably completed his last work by the time of the latter's death, and by such a date all four of the major codices of Old English poetry had been compiled. In other words, the early decades of the eleventh century have a strong sense of endings about them, at least in terms of literary history, and handbooks of Anglo-Saxon literature rarely have much to say about the period that followed, from Wulfstan's death to the Norman Conquest. In most accounts, the important events of Anglo-Saxon literary history were all over and done with some decades in advance of 1066.

This chapter will argue against this view by propounding three related theses: first, that far more was happening in eleventh- and early twelfth-century literary culture in England than traditional accounts might suggest; second, that continuities across the supposed gulf of 1066 mean that an informed understanding of late Anglo-Saxon and early Anglo-Norman literary culture can only be achieved by scrutinizing literary activity in England for some decades after that watershed date as well as before; and third, that the key quality that characterizes and animates this period's literary culture is a pervasive, and productive, internationalism. Ultimately, the changing literature of the long eleventh century was made possible by important continuities in patronage and England's lasting appeal to ambitious foreign clerics across the period.

In part, of course, eleventh-century England's internationalism arose from political factors, most notably interdynastic marriage and conquest. In 1002, Æthelred II married the Norman princess Emma, inaugurating the political alliance which ultimately formed the basis of William the Conqueror's claim to the English throne and sustained cultural contact between the courts of England and north-western France. Meanwhile, eleventh-century England

was conquered by foreign rulers not once, but twice. William's triumph of 1066 was preceded by that of Cnut in 1016, and Cnut himself was reinstating the brief rule of his father Swein in 1013–14. Three generations of Danish kings sat on the throne of England between 1013 and 1042, but in fact the label 'Danish' is reductive here if one considers the matrilineal inheritance of these kings: Cnut was the son of a Polish mother, Harold Harefoot of an English one, Harthacnut of a Norman one. And the kings who succeeded this dynasty were by no means simply 'English' either: Edward the Confessor was Harthacnut's half-brother, son of the same Norman mother, Emma; and Harold Godwineson's mother was the Danish Gytha, sister of Cnut's brother-in-law. After 1066, the Norman domination was staffed by clerks and courtiers from across north-west Europe, and the Anglo-Saxon dynasty even returned in the person of Henry I's wife Matilda II (1080–1118).

England's political ties to other parts of Europe in the eleventh century initiated, reinforced and reconfigured cultural and artistic connections. The patrons and artists we shall meet in this chapter brought their own particular interests, literary cultures and ideas into conversation at the English court, and as often as not English forms and institutions were transformed in the course of being adopted. By the eleventh century, creative writing had become a preferred site for the negotiation of spiritual, political and cultural crises, and the result was a rich and vibrant period of innovation for literary culture in England, across the many languages which political events brought into contact: English, Norse, French, Latin, Flemish and German, in addition to ongoing Welsh, Gaelic and Irish contacts. The eleventh century in England was also the great century for the production of vernacular manuscripts: in Neil Ker's catalogue, some 70 per cent of the extant Old English manuscripts are ascribed to the period.[1] And the eleventh century was a time of dramatic change across western Europe more widely: exchange with the Muslim world brought new scientific learning; Church reform was advanced (and the First Crusade proclaimed); urbanization intensified; and courtly literature gathered pace.

Many of these innovations – for example, in science, in Latin composition and in documentary culture – are discussed elsewhere in this volume (see especially Chapters 19–21). This chapter therefore approaches the 'long' eleventh century less in terms of its literary forms and more in terms of the consequences for literary production of its increased internationalism, and it does this by focusing on the courts of three pivotal kings and their queens:

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1 Ker, *Catalogue*, pp. xv–xviii.

Cnut with his wife Emma, Edward the Confessor with his wife Edith, and Henry I with his two wives Matilda II and Adeliza. This internationalism, it is important to stress, had consequences in both directions, in terms of export as well as import: eleventh-century England was not only receptive to new influences from outside, it was also reaching outwards, and itself exerting influences over the places and cultures it was in contact with. For while the relative neglect of eleventh-century English literary culture has made it appear that England was brought into Europe primarily as a result of 1066, this chapter will argue that eleventh-century England was engaged with broad international developments before the Conquest, and exerted a crucial influence on the way in which literary culture came to evolve in western Europe throughout the twelfth century.

<div align="center">I</div>

We begin, then, with Cnut. His 1027 Letter to his subjects, sent back to England from the continent, proclaims him as 'rex totius Angliae et Danemarkiae et Norregiae et partis Swauorum' [king of all England, Denmark and Norway, and of part of the Swedes].[2] (The Letter now survives only in two Latin versions, but was probably composed in Old English.) Some of this description may have been aspirational as much as factual – Norway did not really come under Cnut's control until the following year – but the styling serves to demonstrate how Cnut's rule brought England firmly and inextricably into the Scandinavian world. This was not a wholly new connection, of course: the previous century and a half of English history had seen Viking attacks, Scandinavian settlement and some continuing trade links between the two places (see Chapter 23). But Cnut's conquest of England, and his establishment of a pan-Scandinavian empire, did lead to a new form of international Anglo-Scandinavianism, especially at an elite level.[3]

We can observe this in both secular and ecclesiastical contexts, both of which were highly pertinent for the patronage and production of literary texts. Cnut's conquest led to the settlement of a substantial Scandinavian gentry in England, especially in the south and west of the country, close to the royal court and the centres of power. Many of these Scandinavian landholders and office-bearers, newly wealthy and speaking Old Norse, are likely

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2 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, vol. I, pp. 324–5; see also Darlington and McGurk (eds.), *Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. II, pp. 512–13.
3 On Cnut's reign see Lawson, *Cnut*; Rumble (ed.), *Reign of Cnut*; and Bolton, *Empire of Cnut*.

to have spent part of their time at court, part at their country estates;[4] and they supply the obvious audience for Norse skaldic verse in England, in which, for example, one poet pointedly remarks that 'orðbrjótr Dǫnum forðar / moldreks' [the breaker (generous sharer) of the earth-ruler's (giant's) words (gold) protects Danes].[5] Nor was this a short-lived affair: although the reign of Cnut's dynasty may have ended in 1042, Timothy Bolton has observed that 'England and Denmark remained in the eyes of an Anglo-Scandinavian elite, at least, linked as a political and cultural unit throughout much of the eleventh century'.[6] The Godwines, for example, should be regarded as an Anglo-Danish family;[7] Beorn, an earl of the east midlands in the time of Edward the Confessor, was the brother of Sveinn Estrithson, king of Denmark;[8] and Earl Waltheof was eulogized in skaldic verse, composed by a Norse poet in England.[9]

The second, ecclesiastical context works more in the opposite direction, of Englishmen entering Scandinavia rather than Scandinavians entering England. Since perhaps the mid-tenth century the Anglo-Saxon Church had had some sort of presence in, or impact on, Scandinavia, however exiguous;[10] but Cnut's reign saw a much more significant movement of clergy into Denmark, Norway and even Sweden, with all that this entailed for textual culture. Adam of Bremen states that Cnut 'episcopos ab Anglia multos adduxit in Daniam' [introduced many bishops from England into Denmark], and goes on to name some of these bishops: Bernhard in Skåne, Gerbrand in Sjælland (that is, at Roskilde) and Reginbert in Fyn.[11] Cnut's father Swein seems to have begun this practice,[12] and Adam also records traffic in the other direction, narrating that a Danish bishop, Odinkar the younger, 'in Angliam ductus est a Knut rege ibique eruditus litteris' [was taken to England by King Cnut and there instructed in letters].[13] Some churchmen spent time in Scandinavia, and then returned to posts in England. For example, before becoming abbot of

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4 See, e.g., Bolton, *Empire of Cnut*, pp. 54–5, 67–8.
5 See Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*', pp. 174–5; and Tyler, 'Cnut's Poets'. The quotation is from Hallvarðr Háreksblesi's *Knútsdrápa*, in Frank, 'King Cnut', pp. 120–1.
6 Bolton, *Empire of Cnut*, p. 308.
7 See Mason, *House of Godwine*; and Barlow, *The Godwins*.
8 Darlington and McGurk (eds.), *Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. II, pp. 548–9.
9 See Jesch, 'Skaldic Verse', pp. 321–3.
10 See Abrams, 'Anglo-Saxons'.
11 Adam of Bremen, *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, p. 115 (trans. *History of the Archbishops*, p. 93). See further Gelting, 'Elusive Bishops'.
12 See Adam of Bremen, *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, p. 101 (trans. *History of the Archbishops*, p. 83).
13 *Ibid.*, p. 97, schol. 25 (26) (trans. *History of the Archbishops*, p. 79).

Abingdon in 1051, a cleric named Rodulf seems to have spent some thirty years as a missionary-bishop in Norway and Iceland, and further evidence of his monastery's Scandinavian connections may be found in an eleventh-century Abingdon manuscript (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 57) that bears in one of its margins a dry-point inscription, in Norse runes, of the Old Norse name *Hávarðr*.[14] (In fact, Abingdon seems to have been a multilingual and cosmopolitan monastery in the early eleventh century, having also boasted a French scholar named Herbert.[15])

The presence of English clergy in early eleventh-century Denmark and Norway necessarily means the presence of English books also, and scraps of English manuscripts (mostly as yet unpublished) have been recovered from later bindings in Scandinavian repositories.[16] Naturally, most of this material is Latin and liturgical, but some is homiletic, and the export of Old English homilies to Scandinavia is also well attested through their later translation into Old Norse.[17] One celebrated volume that may have entered Scandinavia at this period is the Copenhagen Wulfstan manuscript (Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek, MS G.K.S. 1595 (4°)), perhaps as a gift to Gerbrand of Roskilde.[18]

A product of precisely this new cultural environment is the poem *Glælognskviða* [*Sea-Calm Poem*] by Þórarinn loftunga [praise-tongue], composed in Norway *c*. 1032, during the reign there of Cnut's son Sveinn, who was accompanied by his English mother Ælfgifu of Northampton. Þórarinn had earlier composed poetry in honour of Cnut himself, and seems to have accompanied Cnut's fleet to Norway in 1028 when he annexed the country. *Glælognskviða* is the earliest work to celebrate the sanctity of Óláfr Haraldsson (died 1030), Scandinavia's first native saint, and it can be no coincidence that the practice of saint-making, and the text-making associated with it, came to the region during a period of English ecclesiastical influence.[19] The bishop in Trondheim at the time of Óláfr's translation in 1031 was one Grimkell, whom Adam of Bremen records as having been brought from England in Óláfr's lifetime,[20] and the poem itself is full of familiar hagiographic motifs, such as the miraculous ringing of bells:

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14 See Graham, 'Runic Entry'.
15 See Porter, 'Earliest Texts'.
16 See Ommundsen (ed.), *Nordic Scribal Culture*.
17 See Abram, 'Anglo-Saxon Homilies'.
18 Gerritsen, 'Copenhagen Wulfstan Manuscript', pp. 509–11.
19 See Townend, 'Knútr'.
20 Adam of Bremen, *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, pp. 117–18 (trans. *History of the Archbishops*, pp. 94–5).

Þar borðveggs
bjǫllur kneigu
of sæing hans
sjalfar hringjask,
ok hvern dag
heyra þjóðir
klokkna hljóð
of konungmanni.

[There bells in the wooden structure ring by themselves above his bed, and every day people hear the sound of bells above the king.][21]

There is also new, ecclesiastical vocabulary here: 'bjǫllur' [bells] and 'hringjask' [ring] are loanwords from Old English, and 'klokkna' [of bells] ultimately from Latin.[22] The last stanza of the poem, in a complex kenning, describes Óláfr as the 'reginnagl(i) bóka máls' [sacred nail of the language of books]. The language of books, in this context, is of course Latin, and so this phrase us gives us our first extant reference to Latin, and indeed to books, in all of Norse literature – and it does so because *Glælognskviða* is the product of a new eleventh-century culture that is characterized by the intermixing of Norse, English and Latin traditions. Moreover, the cult of St Óláfr, developed in Norway under English influence, soon crossed the North Sea back to England, where it was patronized by Cnut's earls and housecarls.[23] Óláfr thus became the first new saint to enter English commemoration since Archbishop Ælfheah in 1012 – a striking sign of the Anglo-Scandinavian horizons of elite culture at this time.

Once again, however, this time for Cnut's Church, the simplicity of an English/Scandinavian dichotomy needs to be refined – as suggested, for example, by the names of some of the bishops listed by Adam of Bremen. For Cnut's reign marks the beginnings of another shift in ecclesiastical culture in England, as increasing numbers of continental churchmen came to assume offices in the English Church.[24] The 'Lotharingian connection' of the late Anglo-Saxon Church was strengthened in particular, a development that has been convincingly attributed to Cnut's association with the German emperor Conrad II.[25] In 1027 Cnut made a pilgrimage to Rome – the first English king to do so for nearly two centuries – and he was

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21 Ed. and trans. Townend in Whaley (ed.), *Poetry*.
22 See Fischer, *Lehnwörter des Altwestnordischen*.
23 See Dickins, 'Cult of S. Olave'; and Townend, 'Knútr', pp. 266–73.
24 See Barlow, *English Church 1000–1066*; and Ortenberg, *English Church and the Continent*.
25 See Keynes, 'Giso', pp. 205–13; and Hare, 'Cnut and Lotharingia'.

in attendance there at the grand ceremony at which Conrad was crowned as emperor.[26] Later, in 1036, Cnut and Emma's daughter Gunnhild was to marry Conrad's son, Henry III; Cnut's 1027 Letter to his subjects boasts how at Rome 'maxime autem ab imperatore donis uariis et muneribus pretiosis sum, tam in uasis aureis et argenteis quam in palliis et uestibus ualde pretiosis' [in particular I was honoured by the emperor with sundry gifts and precious presents: vessels of gold and silver and very precious fabrics and robes].[27]

This association had immediate and important consequences for textual culture. First, a number of Lotharingian clerics were appointed to significant positions in England, including as royal priests (a role that seems to have increased in importance in the late Anglo-Saxon period), and later as bishops.[28] Second, Cnut and Queen Emma, it has been argued, commissioned or requisitioned a high number of luxury manuscripts to present as diplomatic gifts to the German Church or nobility.[29] One well-known anecdote to this effect is preserved in the *vita* of Wulfstan II of Worcester, the Anglo-Saxon bishop who continued longest in office under the Norman kings (1062–95). Composed originally in Old English by his chaplain Coleman, but now extant only in a Latin version by William of Malmesbury, the *vita* tells how the young Wulfstan was taught by one Earnwig, a skilled scribe and illuminator who decorated in gold a sacramentary and psalter which he presented to Cnut and Emma in the hope of worldly preferment.[30] These two manuscripts were in turn presented to the church in Cologne – where they remained until they were there given in 1054 to Bishop Ealdred of Worcester (on a diplomatic mission to the Emperor Henry III, Cnut's son-in-law), and so returned to England, and indeed to Wulfstan.[31] The anecdote reveals perfectly the movement of clerics and manuscripts between England and Lotharingia in the reign of Cnut and his successors.

Again, these new European connections are articulated also in the extant skaldic verse. The penultimate stanza of Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Knútsdrápa* is as follows:

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26 See Wolfram, *Conrad II*, esp. pp. 102–6.
27 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, vol. I, pp. 326–7; see also Darlington and McGurk (eds.), *Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. II, pp. 514–15.
28 On royal priests, see Keynes, 'Regenbald'.
29 Heslop, 'Production'; see, however, Gameson, *Role of Art*, pp. 258–9.
30 William of Malmesbury, *Saints' Lives*, pp. 16–17.
31 *Ibid.*, pp. 40–1.

> Kom á fylki
> farlyst, þeims bar
> hervíg í hug,
> hafanda staf.
> Rauf ræsir af
> Rúms veg suman
> kærr keisara
> klúss Pétrúsi.

[Desire for a journey came upon the ruler bearing a staff, who bore warfare in his heart. The leader, dear to the emperor, close to Peter, enjoyed some of the glory of Rome.][32]

Pilgrimage to Rome, and the forging of political friendships across Europe, are a new theme for Norse poetry, and present a new image of Scandinavian kingship. Once again, the new subject matter is accompanied, and signalled, by a number of lexical borrowings. The four words in the last two lines of the stanza are all here recorded for the first time in Old Norse: 'kærr' [dear] is a loanword from French, and 'keisara' [emperor] and 'klúss' [close] from Latin via either Old English or German; the fourth word is of course a biblical name in Latinate form. As Roberta Frank has said, 'the four words, linked by rhyme and consonance, re-enact, recapitulate, Cnut's successful "networking" with the two great political powers of western Europe'.[33]

Politically, it seems evident that contact with Conrad precipitated, or accelerated, a clearer ideology of empire on the part of Cnut. For the Anglo-Danish king, the 1027 pilgrimage to Rome was bracketed by the Battle of Holy River in 1026 (when he resisted a Swedish–Norwegian alliance) and his conquest of Norway in 1028. Cnut's increasingly imperial behaviour and self-projection, from the design of his crowns to the appointment of his sons as sub-kings, seem indebted to German models, and to have taken shape in the wake of his 1027 encounter.[34] Moreover, the great majority of extant skaldic verse in Cnut's honour dates from after these three watersheds of 1026–8.[35] In other words, Cnut's patronage of skaldic verse can, and probably should, be read as a gesture of imperial largesse and aggrandizement, whereby he made his court the leading centre for poetic composition, and so effected a fundamental shift in the geography of skaldic culture, from Norway to England.

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32 Ed and trans. Townend in Whaley (ed.), *Poetry*.
33 Frank, 'King Cnut', p. 118.
34 See Lawson, *Cnut*, pp. 136–8; and Bolton, *Empire of Cnut*, pp. 289–307.
35 See Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*', pp. 151–62.

A verse by Óttarr svarti [the Black] strikes the right note in terms of imperial dominion:

> Svá skal kveðja
> konung Dana,
> Íra ok Engla
> ok Eybúa,
> at hans fari
> með himinkrǫptum
> lǫndum ǫllum
> lof víðara.

[I shall so greet the king of the Danes, of the Irish and of the English and of the Island-dwellers [Orcadians], that his praise may travel with heavenly support more widely through all the lands.][36]

The later Icelandic *Skáldatal* or *List of Poets* lists Óttarr svarti as having composed for at least six patrons, two Danish (Cnut and his father Swein Forkbeard), two Swedish (Óláfr Eiríksson and his son Ǫnundr) and two Norwegian (Óláfr Haraldsson and the magnate Dala-Guðbrandr) – an eloquent indicator of the skaldic circuit into which England was brought by Cnut.[37] Another of the poets who came to Cnut's court, probably in 1027, was Sigvatr Þórðarson, Óttarr's uncle and the greatest Norse poet of the early eleventh century.[38] Sigvatr had been appointed by his main patron, Óláfr Haraldsson of Norway, to the high rank of *stallari* or 'staller', a Scandinavian office introduced into England by Cnut.[39] In a series of anecdotal stanzas entitled *Vestrfararvísur* [*Verses on a Western Journey*], Sigvatr records his visit to Cnut's court, and on the same journey he also travelled to Rouen – not the last poet of the eleventh century to cross the Channel. Sigvatr's verses testify to Cnut's patronage of poets, describing him as 'mildr mætra hringa' [generous with precious rings] and recording that the arms of Sigvatr and another skald in his company had been 'skrautliga búnar' [splendidly adorned] by the king.[40] As Bjarne Fidjestøl demonstrated, Cnut was remembered in Norse tradition as the most munificent of all skaldic patrons; for one poem, for example, he rewarded

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36 Ed and trans. Townend in Whaley (ed.), *Poetry*. See further Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*', pp. 157–9.
37 Egilsson *et al.* (eds.), *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, vol. III, pp. 251–86.
38 See Poole, 'Sighvat Þórðarson'; and Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*', pp. 153–6.
39 See Katharin Mack, 'Stallers'.
40 Text from Jónsson (ed.), *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, BI, p. 227.

Þórarinn loftunga with the immense sum of 50 marks, or about 25 pounds of silver.[41]

Thus in the skaldic sphere as well as the ecclesiastical, Cnut deployed England's great wealth to further his international standing. Skaldic verse was not simply transplanted to England during Cnut's reign, there to continue unaffected; rather, skaldic poetics themselves were altered through contact with English culture, and were re-exported to Scandinavia in altered form, as the case of Þórarinn's *Glælognskviða* shows. The Anglo-Scandinavian internationalism of Cnut's reign had enduring political consequences, but it also marked a new development in England's literary history.

II

During the Confessor's reign the internationalism of the court's literary culture was both deeper and more diverse, and the queen's role in this creation emerges more clearly. Born to Æthelred II and Emma, Edward spent much of his adolescence and adulthood exiled in the ducal court in Normandy, as a result of the Danish conquest. He became a well-known figure across north-western France and Flanders. Invited to share in the rule of the kingdom by his half-brother Harthacnut (the son of his mother and Cnut) in 1041, he initially came to the throne by association with the Anglo-Danish dynasty and not as a restoration of the ancient house of Wessex. When Harthacnut died childless the following year, Edward was crowned sole king. A notable feature of Edward's retinue on his return to England, as of his court and the Church during his reign, was the prominence of continental clerics, including not only Francophone Normans and other Frenchmen, but also Germans, Flemings and the now familiar Lotharingians.[42]

The lay members of his court were equally international. He married Edith, daughter of Godwine and his Danish wife Gytha. Edith is celebrated by Edward's biographer as impressively multilingual, speaking English, French, Danish and Irish, as well as being Latinate.[43] His court provided opportunities for his Norman and French kinsmen and had close ties to Flanders where Emma was exiled after Cnut's death, where Edward visited and where members of the Godwine family fled when banished in 1051. During this crisis, Harold found refuge in Ireland. Harold's brother Tostig was married to

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41 Fidjestøl, 'Have you heard a poem worth more?'
42 Keynes, 'Regenbald', 'Æthelings in Normandy', and 'Giso'; Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, pp. 39–42, 50–1, 73–5, and *English Church 1000–1066*, pp. 156–8.
43 Goscelin, 'Légende de Ste Édith', pp. 22–3.

Judith, daughter of Baldwin IV, count of Flanders. Late in the Confessor's reign, Harold married Ealdgyth, English widow of the Welsh king Gruffydd. After they returned from Hungary in 1057, the court also included the family of the Confessor's cousin, Edward the Exile: the Hungarian Agatha, kinswoman of the German emperor, and her children Edgar, Margaret and Christina. Edward's court also sheltered Malcolm, later king of the Scots and husband of Margaret.

Internationalism and the attendant multilingualism which marked the Confessor's court had a direct impact on the language of its secular literary culture, with Latin now taking a major role. This was not the cliquish and abstruse hermeneutic Latin of the Benedictine Reformers, but rather a more communicative Latin suited to the expression of the increasingly European aspirations of the court's secular elite.[44] The *Encomium Emmae reginae* (written by a Flemish cleric for the Norman widow of a Dane), *The Cambridge Songs* (a German collection of Latin poetry) and the *Vita Ædwardi* (written for the Anglo-Danish queen Edith, likely also by a Fleming) cannot be detected by the paradigms of nationalizing literary history, and thus England in the reign of Edward has seemed like a literary desert.[45] On the contrary, close attention to the way these texts use the myths and history of classical literature – the Roman story-world – reveals a vigorous literary culture deeply invested in the complex politics of a long and troubled reign, where multiple dynasties – West Saxon, Anglo-Danish, Norman and even Norwegian – vied with each other to fill the gap made by the Confessor's lack of an heir.[46] The multilingual court of eleventh-century England was on the cutting edge of radical developments, more usually associated with the twelfth-century renaissance, whereby European secular elites claimed the Roman story-world, especially the Trojan foundation of Rome, for themselves, using it to shape and interpret lay experience.[47] The international networks of the English court not only drew it to the Roman story-world, but ensured that what happened there fed into European developments.

The *Encomium* was written under the direct patronage of Emma for and from within the court during the period of Harthacnut and Edward's joint rule. Its aim was to protect the interests of the queen amidst the bitter factionalism that

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44 Tyler, 'From Old English to Old French', p. 168, and 'Crossing Conquests'.
45 See introductions in Campbell (ed. and trans.), *Encomium Emmae reginae*; Ziolkowski (ed. and trans.), *Cambridge Songs*; and Barlow (ed. and trans.), *Life of King Edward*.
46 Wiseman, *Myths of Rome*, pp. 10–12.
47 Baswell, *Virgil*; Tilliette, '*Troiae ab oris*'; and Tyler, 'Trojans'.

followed Cnut's death.[48] The recent discovery of a later recension of the *Encomium* (Copenhagen, Royal Library, MS Acc. 2011 15), rewritten after Harthacnut's death, forcefully underscores that the political utility of the Roman story-world was a resource Emma found useful again and again. Edward was among those Emma sought to influence by offering an account of the Danish conquest and rule of England that represented Cnut both as a pious Christian ruler and as a second Aeneas, founding a new dynasty and empire.[49] Emma's active participation in the creation of both the text and its message of her integral place within an Anglo-Danish dynasty on whose future the stability of England rests is conveyed by the Encomiast's bold figuring of her as Augustus. He announces that he will do for her what Virgil did for his patron, Rome's first emperor: praise her by praising her family.[50]

The strong classicizing element in the *Encomium* cannot be solely attributed to the literary culture of the text's learned Flemish author. Rather, it was a discourse which had meaning for Emma and the deeply divided court she wished to sway; otherwise, this text would have been useless in her defence. Emma's own hand is evident in the Encomiast's deployment of his Trojan material. In an age when it was increasingly fashionable, including among the Normans, to claim Trojan origins, the text does not claim them for Cnut, displaying a remarkable sensitivity to Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian traditions. These concerns are much more likely to be those of Emma than those of a Fleming.

The rejection of literal descent from Troy has profound literary consequences, opening up a space for theorizing about fiction which the Encomiast enthusiastically takes up and to which he alerts his audience. He refers to the *Aeneid* as the 'vetus fabula' [ancient fable], that is, as what would come to be theorized in the twelfth century as fiction.[51] This signposted use of 'fabula', alongside his exploration of the nature of fiction in his two prefaces, draws attention to important dimensions of the text's reception. How could a text such as the *Encomium*, aimed at influencing the Anglo-Danish court, suppress Æthelred's marriage to Emma and pass their sons off as Cnut's and Emma's other sons?[52] This audience, which included Edward himself,

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48 Discussion of the *Encomium* draws on Tyler, 'Fictions of Family', and 'Talking about History'; further references can be found in these articles. See also Campbell's and Keynes's introductions to the edition itself, and Orchard, 'Literary Background'.
49 Cnut's fleet is heavily Virgilian: Campbell (ed. and trans.), *Encomium Emmae reginae*, pp. 18–21.
50 *Ibid.*, pp. 6–9.
51 *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.
52 *Ibid.*, pp. 34–5.

would have recognized that Emma and the Encomiast were creating a political fiction. If political fiction could legitimize Augustus' rule – and the Encomiast knew from the commentary tradition that this was what Virgil was doing – it could also advance the cause of Anglo-Danish rule. From this perspective, the panegyric of the *Encomium* is as much akin to the skaldic praise poetry of Cnut's reign as to Latin history writing.

In order for the *Encomium* to further Emma's interests, it had to be effectively received at court. There are no claims that Emma, Edward or Harthacnut were Latinate. Thus the *Encomium* stands as a text which must have been read aloud and explained in the several vernaculars of the English court of the mid-1040s. The Latin of the text, however, retained a symbolic value as a European language. Like the story of Troy itself, Latin was uniquely suited to promulgating a political vision not tied to any of the competing linguistic communities or political factions which jostled for power as the Anglo-Danish regime came to an end and the West Saxon dynasty was restored in the person of the Francophone Edward.

Turning to the middle of Edward's reign, *The Cambridge Songs* comprise an anthology of Latin verse ranging from poems composed in medieval Germany, France and Italy back to excerpts from classical and late antique authors. Described as 'the most varied and substantial assemblage of Medieval Latin lyrics . . . extant from the centuries between the Carolingian corpora of the ninth century and . . . the thirteenth', much of the collection is boldly secular in nature, including fabliaux, political poems and love songs. The songs are found in Cambridge, University Library, MS Gg 5.35, a mid-eleventh-century St Augustine's manuscript, where they follow a classbook of Latin poetry, ranging from late antiquity to eleventh-century England. Although their appearance in England has been seen as accidental, when situated in the context of the internationalism of the English court, the songs further reveal the openness of England to new European trends.[53] The monks of St Augustine's evidently saw no conflict between old and new.

The presence of six poems celebrating German emperors immediately draws attention to the court of Henry III as a possible origin for the collection.[54] This strong element of panegyric brings to mind the importance of this mode to the *Encomium*, while its mix of lamentation with praise in poems marking the deaths of Henry II and Conrad II will be matched in the *Vita Ædwardi*. Like Cnut, the emperors are primarily remembered as pious

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53 Ziolkowski (ed. and trans.), *Cambridge Songs*, pp. xvii–xxxix (quotation p. xviii); Rigg and Wieland, 'Canterbury Classbook'.
54 Ziolkowski (ed. and trans.), *Cambridge Songs*, p. xxxii.

Christian rulers, with Rome invoked as an ecclesiastical centre. The Roman story-world is not, however, left behind. Carmen 11 opens with the words 'Magnus cesar Otto' and announces at the end that praise of the three Ottos would exceed even the power of Virgil.[55] The speeches of two mourning women from Statius' *Thebaid* precede Carmen 33, Wipo's pious lament for Conrad II, and classical verse follows it, as Aeneas recounts his sorrow over the death of Hector, 'spes o fidissima Teucrum' [O trustiest hope of the Trojans].[56] This juxtaposition of contemporary and classical will recur in the *Vita*.

The inclusion of Wipo's poem among *The Cambridge Songs* suggests that it was through the court's international connections, not chance, that the book arrived in England. The poem mourns not only Conrad but also Gunnhild, Cnut and Emma's daughter, who married the emperor's son. Edward's maintenance of an alliance with Henry III, whom the *Vita* remembers as a kinsman, provides a context for understanding how a collection of poems which came together in the German court should come to be preserved in an Anglo-Saxon monastery. Perhaps *The Cambridge Songs* were among the books which Ealdred brought back from his diplomatic mission in 1054, during which he spent a year in Cologne as guest of the emperor and archbishop. Edward's imperial connections were, however, extensive, and the book could have travelled with any one of the German and Lotharingian clerics who found preferment in Edward's kingdom.[57]

Among those clerics with imperial connections, Leofric, bishop of Exeter, donor of the famous Exeter Book, stands out when we consider the connections between *The Cambridge Songs* and English literary culture. Although the Exeter Book was compiled in the late tenth century, it bears a remarkable resemblance to Gg 5.35 when both the classbook and the songs are taken together. Both manuscripts contain poetry on the life of Christ, riddles, *The Phoenix*, love poems, laments and maxims, and evince an interest in the court. The Exeter Book would not have looked either old-fashioned or outside the European cultural mainstream when donated in 1072, despite its being written in English. Leofric himself was ideally placed to see the literary connections of the Exeter Book. Bearing an Anglo-Saxon name, though probably Cornish by birth, he had been raised and educated in

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55 *Ibid*., pp. 48–55, 196–202.
56 *Ibid*., pp. 107–11, 272–8.
57 Barlow (ed. and trans.), *Life of King Edward*, pp. 16–17; Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, pp. 98–9, 214–15; Lapidge, 'Ealdred of York and MS. Cotton Vitellius E. XII' in his *Anglo-Latin Literature, 900–1066*, pp. 453–67 and 492.

Lotharingia. He returned to England with Edward in 1041 as his chaplain.[58]
Viewed from within the context of their manuscript and of Edward's court,
The Cambridge Songs do not look so unanchored from English literary
culture, an impression that is strengthened when we turn to consider the
next literary monument of Edward's reign.[59]

The *Vita Ædwardi* was composed by an anonymous continental cleric at
Queen Edith's behest. He was probably, like the Encomiast, a Fleming from St
Omer. Edith's connections to the kingdom's elite crossed partisan boundaries:
wife of the Confessor, she was also a Godwine.[60] The text was written to
defend her in the wake of the strife between her brothers Harold and Tostig,
which led to the Battle of Stamford Bridge and in turn contributed to defeat at
Hastings. Edith weathered these storms and accommodated herself to
William, for whom his cousin's widow represented a symbol of legitimacy.
In the *Vita Ædwardi* the decades of alternating uneasy alliance and open
hostility between Godwine's party and Edward threaten to pull apart the
story Edith wishes to tell.

The form of the text embodies this very tension. The *Vita* is made up of
two parts. Part I is essentially a secular biography of the king (albeit a very
pious one). Part II begins anew, attempting to redeem the Confessor's life by
shaping it into an incipient hagiography. Each part is introduced by a
prologue in the form of a dialogue between the poet and his Muse. These
prologues are directly modelled on the dialogue between Lady Philosophy
and the Prisoner in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, bringing to mind the
central place of the Meters of Boethius in *The Cambridge Songs*. In addition to
the doubling of secular and sacred biography, the prosimetrical form of Part
I, where there are verse and prose versions of each episode, offers a dual
perspective to which the Anonymous explicitly draws his readers' atten-
tion.[61] The doubling continues, with the verse falling broadly into two
categories: classicizing and religious. The classicizing poems offer dark and
starkly critical views of Edward and especially of the Godwines. The re-
ligious verse, in contrast, praises these men in line with the celebratory prose
of both parts of the *Vita*.

The classicizing poetry of the *Vita* draws heavily on Virgil, Lucan, Statius
and Ovid, all of whom the Anonymous looks to as he tries to find an

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58 Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, p. 50, and *English Church*, pp. 83–4.
59 Tyler benefited from discussing the relationship between Gg 5.35 and the Exeter Book
   with Kirsten Armstrong while supervising her University of York MA dissertation in
   2009.
60 See further Tyler, '*Vita Ædwardi*', and *Crossing Conquests*.
61 Barlow (ed. and trans.), *Life of King Edward*, pp. 8–9.

interpretive framework within which to understand the chaos which engulfed the Confessor's kingdom.[62] The first poem within Part I takes up the Muse's command to write Virgilian panegyric – a mode familiar from the poem on the three Ottos in *The Cambridge Songs*. As Edward becomes king, Godwine ostensibly displays his loyalty with the gift of a spectacular gold-ornamented ship. The poem commemorates Edward as a second Aeneas, with the poet declaring 'decus armorum . . . non inferiorum, / quanquam Vulcani referuntur in arte parari, / regi Troiano nullo cedentia telo' [the splendour of the weaponry in no way inferior to the arms of the Trojan king, even though those are ascribed to the skill of Vulcan].[63] The sails of the ship depict his ancestors and their sea battles in language which recalls Virgil's representation of the Battle of Actium, when Augustus defeated Mark Anthony and Cleopatra, securing the empire for himself.[64] Much, however, lies below this surface.

Edward's ship is a conscious rewriting of Cnut's Virgilian fleet from the *Encomium*; hence Edward replaces Cnut as Aeneas, and Anglo-Danish aspirations to establish a long-lived dynasty are mocked. There is a sting in the tail for Edward too. Aeneas' shield was a prophecy of the future, Edward's depicts the past: even as his succession and the restoration of the West Saxon dynasty is celebrated, its end is marked. Godwine, whose gift portrays him as the power behind the throne, is likened to a Greek bearing gifts. Allusion to the Trojan horse recasts Godwine, not as a supporter of the house of Wessex, but as the cause of its end. This ironic use of Virgil, chiming with subtle allusions to Lucan's poetic account of civil war and Statius' song of fratricide, builds up a picture of the joy at Edward's coronation as illusory and points forward to future disaster. Ovidian metamorphosis comes into play elsewhere when the Anonymous imagines the house of Godwine as a stream-tree-serpent which attacks its own roots.[65]

The absence of any allusion to Trojan origins for the house of Wessex in this first poem comes into stark relief in Part II, when the Anonymous uses allusion to ridicule Welsh claims to descent from Troy.[66] The derision of the Trojan Welsh underscores how the story of the Trojan foundation was, for the

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62 'Secula . . . aurea' [golden age], Ovidian metamorphosis and explicit invocation of Lucan and Statius, *ibid*., pp. 6–7, 26–7, 84–5.

63 This poem has until recently been incomplete. See now Summerson, 'Tudor Antiquaries', pp. 170–2, as well as Barlow (ed. and trans.), *Life of King Edward*, pp. 20–1.

64 Virgil, *Aeneid*, VIII.608–731.

65 Barlow (ed. and trans.), *Life of King Edward*, pp. 26–9.

66 *Ibid*., pp. 86–7.

Anonymous and his audience, simultaneously a powerful interpretive framework for secular experience and a fiction, a 'fabula' as the Encomiast put it in a line known to the Anonymous. The marriage of Gryffudd's widow, Ealdgyth, to Harold reminds us that these debates about Trojan origins were quintessentially court concerns. The *Aeneid*'s fictionality, meanwhile, in no way undermined the value of the Roman story-world. Elsewhere the Anonymous asserts that it expressed truths also found in the Bible:

> Hęcine gentilis sine re descripserit error?
> Doctrinę plenum figmentum tale probatur.
> [Would pagan-error without fact write thus?
> The *figmentum* full of lessons earns our trust.][67]

This exhilarating confidence in the Roman story-world and fiction, in a text both deeply engaged with classical Latin poetry and written for secular audiences, places the poet in the vanguard of new developments in literary culture associated with a group of poets usually referred to as the Loire School, whose best-known proponents were Marbod of Rennes, Hildebert of Lavardin, Baudri of Bourgueil and Godfrey of Reims.[68] That this kind of poetry, so associated with the twelfth-century renaissance and French literary culture, was composed in pre-Conquest England by a Fleming for a multilingual queen, was – like the arrival of *The Cambridge Songs* at St Augustine's – no accident, and it should confound our expectations of Anglo-Saxon and French literary history.

Yet by the time the *Vita* was finished Edward's court had been swept away, and we must look elsewhere for an audience still engaged with its battles. Edith, along with other high-status Anglo-Saxon women, retired to the royal nunnery at Wilton, where she had been educated as a girl and which she had supported during her married life.[69] It is here, in this impressively learned congregation, that the dowager queen had to explain herself. The *Vita*'s multiple perspectives make most sense when it is read as a text for this community, whose members included not only secular and religious women but, in the years after 1066, women who held conflicting views about the Godwines and the Confessor. Moreover, the opinions which the *Vita* aimed to influence were not cut off from the larger world of the displaced Anglo-Saxon aristocracy. This royal nunnery, always closely associated with

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67 *Ibid.*, pp. 60–1.
68 Bond, *Loving Subject*, pp. 42–69; Tilliette, '*Troiae ab oris*'.
69 Discussion of Wilton builds on and extends Hollis *et al.* (eds.), *Writing the Wilton Women*.

the court, remained open after the Conquest to those who had once been a part of it.[70]

The departure for Angers (c. 1080) of Eve, a nun of Lotharingian and Danish parentage, who had been tutored at Wilton by the Flemish monk Goscelin, underscores the extent to which this nunnery shared the internationalism of the Anglo-Saxon court. The close affiliation of the *Vita* to the poetry of the Loire, coupled with Eve's decision to go to a hermitage attached to the Angevin nunnery of Le Ronceray, points to well-established ties between Wilton and Angers, as well as to the Anonymous's own networks. Moreover, the *Vita* predates the period when Marbod and Baudri exchanged poems with the Le Ronceray women, with Baudri himself claiming that Muriel, a Wilton nun, was his first female poetic correspondent.[71] It looks as though a poet associated with the Loire School found his first sympathetic female audience at Wilton.

The character of the *Vita*'s poetry challenges established paradigms which see England as brought by the Conquest into a newly emerging European literary culture, dominated by France. Important early steps in this development of literary culture, including, above all, finding patrons and audiences among secular women, took place in England, and rested on established practices of using the Roman story-world at court and of educating elite women in royal nunneries. Le Ronceray, in contrast, was founded in 1028 and remained the only nunnery in Anjou until the twelfth century. The rich and complex poetry of the *Vita* rests on two pillars: the Roman story-world as political discourse, and advanced literacy. Thanks to Wilton, Anglo-Saxon royal and aristocratic women were well placed to take the political fictions of the *Encomium* to new levels of sophistication. It would be another generation before the Loire poets would find patrons among the women of the Conqueror's family.[72] By providing secular patronage and audiences (especially including women) for Latin poetry, the international court culture of Anglo-Saxon England made an important contribution to European literary culture.

Edward's court also provides a context for considering literature written in English. Although Leofric donated the Exeter Book to his cathedral in 1072, the later eleventh century is not remembered as a period when classical Old English verse flourished. Indeed, the Chronicle poems marking the deaths of the Ætheling Alfred in 1036 and of William the Conqueror in 1086, show the

70 Keynes, 'Giso', pp. 243–7, 262–3.
71 Baudri, *Carmina*, vol. II, pp. 46–7, 218–20.
72 Van Houts, 'Latin Poetry'.

Old English alliterative tradition open to the influence of Latin and perhaps French rhyming verse.[73] In this context, the classical Old English poem written to commemorate the death of Edward, found in the C and D versions of the Chronicle, appears archaic.[74] The poem, in which Edward is remembered in the manner of the kings of *Beowulf* and *Brunanburh*, lends itself to being read as a lament for the passing of Anglo-Saxon England. This it most certainly is. The lament gathers poignancy when the significance of its conservative form – composed as it was in an Anglo-Saxon literary culture fully open to Europe – is borne in mind. The most court-centred version of the Chronicle, D, was compiled in close association with Ealdred, now archbishop of York.[75] Ealdred, who may have brought back *The Cambridge Songs* and who was surely familiar with the poetry of the imperial court, was also an audience for this archaic poem about Edward. Ealdred, that most international of courtiers, illustrates that the deliberate archaism of *The Death of Edward* made its meaning not in a backward Anglo-Saxon world but in an international court which continued to use and promote English for history writing, for poetry and for government administration, while contributing to the emergence of new kinds of distinctly European literary culture.

III

After Edith's retirement, elite authors shied away from the royal court, instead offering dedications to ecclesiastical magnates and to the Conqueror's daughters, Adela, countess of Blois, and Cecilia, abbess of Ste-Trinité-de-Caen.[76] After the accession of William's youngest son Henry in 1100, however, writers looked to the royal household for inspiration and support once again. By Henry's death in 1135, literary patronage had become definitively associated with the queenship of his wives Matilda II and Adeliza. Artists in the queens' retinues rehabilitated and transformed the tastes and institutions of Cnut's and Edward's courts. By reimagining Anglo-Danish practices as part of an international, multilingual milieu, newly expanded by the Conquest, they made the Anglo-Norman court the earliest home of French-language literature and made a signal contribution not just to 'English literature', but to world literature as a whole.

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73 Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS C, *s.a.* 1036 and MS E, *s.a.* 1086.
74 Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MSS C and D, *s.a.* 1065.
75 Cubbin (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS D*, pp. lxxviii–lxxxi.
76 Van Houts, 'Latin Poetry'.

Certainly, scribes were capable of recording French before the twelfth century, and in the *Séquence de Sainte Eulalie* and the *Sermon sur Jonas* we possess evidence of their activity in the ninth and tenth centuries at the Abbey of St-Amand-les-Eaux, which lay on the linguistic frontier between East and West Francia.[77] But an unbroken history of French literature only emerges several hundred years later, in and around the Anglo-Norman court. Why this should be so remains a lively topic of debate;[78] clearly, however, 'the origins of French literature' in England represent the convergence of several factors, developing out of international networks from the eleventh century and earlier. Decisive in this regard were the incorporation of novel literary modes into the existing model of Anglo-Saxon queenly patronage; a revived and reoriented international tone at court (with Lotharingia appearing again as a focus, not to mention Normandy, Scotland and a resurgent Norse cultural area in the east midlands and the north); and a renewed engagement with the artistic possibilities of the book. The contemporary rise of provincial and ecclesiastic courts as major patrons of written literature to rival the old royal centre also played its part in establishing French literature as an elite pursuit throughout the British Isles, northern France and beyond. No simple statement of the cultural uniqueness of the English, Normans, or their hyphenated equivalents will do to account for the international success and influence of the French of England.

The Anglo-Norman court's accommodation of Anglo-Saxon and European forms received its strongest impulse from Henry's first queen, Matilda II. Educated at Romsey and Wilton, and a direct descendant of Æthelred II through her mother St Margaret of Scotland (one of those Hungarian exiles brought to England by Edward's ambassador Ealdred), Matilda would have been well acquainted with Anglo-Saxon royal women's traditional role as bearers of a particular spiritual and cultural legacy. Like her predecessors since the Benedictine Reform, Matilda promoted monastic religion through numerous endowments (and, sometimes, intervention in monasteries' internal affairs), and in her correspondence with Hildebert of Le Mans and Anselm of Canterbury she had access to the new, influential

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77 Zink, *Littérature française*, pp. 27–30.
78 For important approaches, see Short, 'Patrons and Polyglots'; Legge, 'Précocité'; and Rothwell, 'Role of French'; see further the chapters in Wogan-Browne *et al.* (eds.), *Language and Culture*, pp. 149–231. The important descriptive catalogue of early French vernacular book culture, Careri *et al.* (eds.), *Livres et écritures en français et en occitan au XIIe siècle*, appeared too late to be taken into consideration for this chapter. But see Nixon, 'Role of Audience'.

'Anselmian' spirituality.[79] *The Life of St Margaret* by Prior Turgot of Durham, which Matilda commissioned, presented these spiritual ideas in a narrative form that also fulfilled political ends.[80]

The queen undoubtedly took seriously her role, institutionalized by Emma and Edith, as a patroness of dynastic history and panegyric in Latin. Crowds of clerks, scholars and musicians accompanied her everywhere, and she originally commissioned from William of Malmesbury his masterpiece of historiography, the *Gesta regum Anglorum*, as a 'short' account of *her* royal ancestors.[81] Meanwhile, she was the subject of exuberant Latin poems by the same Loire School of poets cultivated by Edith and the Conqueror's daughters. The elderly Marbod of Rennes praised Matilda's beauty and charm, while Hildebert more solemnly compared her to her mother, 'quae clausa sepulcro / Illustrat meritis Anglica regna suis' [who enclosed within her tomb / By her merits fills the English kingdoms with light].[82] In their preoccupation with her regality, innate but also the effect of her coronation, these poems celebrate the charisma that Matilda – daughter of St Margaret, Alfred's descendant, and consecrated queen – would have projected. Yet they also evince a desire to enrich the native traditions Matilda personified with the latest and most innovative trends in art and spiritual life imported from places that had been outside the ken of the Anglo-Danish court.[83]

With the arrival of Queen Adeliza in 1121, court patronage moved sharply in another direction: towards written poetry in French. Yet even as the queen's court writers staked out new linguistic territory, their point of departure was the same cultural area occupied by Matilda's Anglo-Norman court. Adeliza was the daughter of Godfrey, duke of Lower Lotharingia and count of Louvain, and she came to the throne without her predecessor's deep experience of English cultural traditions. Apart from an undistinguished metre by Henry of Huntingdon, only one Latin poem was written in her honour, and a solicitous letter to her from Hildebert apparently went unanswered.[84] Yet the French poems dedicated to her bear the stamp of an expectation that the new queen, like Matilda, would support works of dynastic praise by foreign

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79 Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, pp. 103–43; for the prehistory of 'Anselmian' spirituality in eleventh-century England and the valley of the Loire, see Hollis *et al.* (eds.), *Writing the Wilton Women*, pp. 281–306; and McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, pp. 25–85.

80 *AA.SS* Junius II, Dies 10, 0328B–0355D; and Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, pp. 161–78.

81 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, Ep. II.

82 Hildebert, 'Augustis patribus augustior', 11–21, PL 171, col. 1408.

83 Tyler, *Crossing Conquests*.

84 Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, pp. vii, 33; PL 171, cols. 189–91; for the poem, see below.

authors and take an interest in learning and spiritual reform. (In respect to the latter, she may have been expected to follow her husband's lead.[85]) What is decidedly new is Adeliza's taste for big, bound books in the vernacular, whereas Matilda preferred Latin in a number of different media (books, letters, oral performance). The cradle of French literature in England is more precisely a new market for stylish, durable French books.

The potential of French as a language of the book is nowhere more apparent than in the *Bestiaire* dedicated to Adeliza by the Norman poet Philippe de Thaon.[86] The same author had written earlier, probably in 1113, the first extant work of Anglo-Norman French poetry: his *Comput* or guide to the Christian calendar, dedicated to his uncle Humphrey de Thaon, the chaplain to the king's steward Eudo 'Dapifer'.[87] Philippe's reformist wish was to serve ignorant priests and laypersons, for otherwise they would not know how to maintain the law and would fail at their heaven-appointed task. Philippe therefore provides explanations of the days of the week, the months, the signs of Zodiac and the liturgical seasons, and he provides memorable moralizations for most of these. For instance, the centaurine Sagittarius represents God, because at first he went among the Jews as a man, but later when he took vengeance on them he was like a beast: 'Lur fait le sanc issir, E ceo fait le ferir, / Pur ceo quë il traïrent E forment le forfirent' [1741–4; he makes their blood flow, and it is their betrayal of him and their great transgression that make him strike].

The breadth and bent of Philippe's thinking can be inferred from this example, but nevertheless he should not be dismissed, as he sometimes is, as a narrow-minded mediocrity. The *Comput* was not translated from any single source, and in fact Philippe's treatise includes bestiary material (when he moralizes Leo), reflections on a priest's ideal book collection (drawn from Augustine), and a demonstration of his own rhetorical ingenuity (in a mock attack aimed at his imagined critics). It is an ambitious work and well designed to attract royal attention, if such was Philippe's intent. More importantly, the *Comput* was the first time in over a century that a work of reformist clerical learning in the vernacular was associated, even indirectly, with a secular patron in England. Philippe shares none of Ælfric's anxieties about

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85 J. Green, *Henry I*, pp. 254–83; Stafford, '*Cherchez la femme*'.

86 A text in the original orthography can be found in Morini (ed.), *Bestiari medievali*. References will be to the more readily accessible Walberg edition.

87 Philippe de Thaon, *Comput*, ed. Short, and *Li Cumpoz Philipe de Thaün*, ed. Mall; references are to the Short edition. For the date, see Philippe de Thaon, *Livre de Sibile*; probable further work by Philippe can be found there and in Studer and Evans (eds.), *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, pp. 200–76.

disseminating clerical knowledge outside the Latinate elite, but he is aware that his work is not easily categorized:

> Në est pas juglerie,
> Nen est griu ne latins,   Ne nen est angevins,
> Ainz est raisun mustree   De la nostre cuntree . . .   (98–102)

> [It is not light entertainment,
> It is not Greek or Latin,   Nor is it Angevin;
> Rather, it is set out as a treatise   Of our own country . . .]

Unwilling to present his work either as true scholarship ('Nen est griu ne latins') or as pure amusement, Philippe settles for the ambiguous term 'raisun' – which might signify a treatise or a formal argument, but which could also simply mean 'speech' – of 'our own country', that is, of his and Humphrey's Norman homeland, playfully distinguished from hated Anjou. His work thus enlists the interests of both patriotic Normans and the international team of reformers who were gaining influence with King Henry. His choice of the vernacular appears less a continuation of the Benedictine Reform's educational agenda (typified by Ælfric and Byhrtferth) than a like-minded response to similar pressures being exerted on a changed political world.

Philippe's *Bestiaire* is a more ambitious work than the *Comput*, and it was dedicated, in grand style, to Queen Adeliza:

> Philippes de Taün   En franceise raisun
> At estrait Bestiaire,   Un livre de gramaire,
> Pur l'onur d'une geme   Ki mult est bele feme
> E est curteise e sage,   De bones murs e large:
> Aaliz est numee,   Reïne est curunee,
> Reïne est d'Engletere;   [Sue] anme n'ait ja guere!
> E oëz de sun num   Que en ebreu truvum:
> Aaliz sis nuns est;   Loënge de Dé est
> En ebreu en verté   Aaliz, *laus* de Dé.
> N'en os faire loënge,   Qu'envire ne me prenge,
> Mais qu'el seit remembree   E tuz jurz mais loëe
> Cest livre voil traitier;   Deus seit al cumencier!   (1–24)

[Philippe de Thaon   Has distilled into a French treatise
The *Bestiary*,   A book in Latin,
For the honour of a jewel   Who is an outstandingly beautiful woman.
And she is courtly and wise,   Of good customs and generous:
She is called 'Aaliz',   Queen is she crowned,

> She is the queen of England;   May her soul never know trouble!
> Listen to what we find   About her name in Hebrew:
> 'Aaliz' is her name;   'Praise of God' is
> In Hebrew truly   'Aaliz', *laus* of God.
> I do not dare give further praise,   Lest envy take me,
> But so that she may be remembered   And praised forever more
> I wish to compose this book;   May God be present at its beginning!]

No more is said about the queen or about the playful 'etymology' of her name in the rest of the book, which catalogues the names, attributes and cosmic 'signefiances' of animals, birds and stones, in the ancient tradition of the *Physiologus*. For example, he describes how the 'Castor' [beaver] gnaws off his genitals and throws them away when pursued by hunters, giving up his most valuable body part (because they are filled with musk) rather than risking his life:

> Chastre sei de sun gré   Pur ço est si numé . . .
> Castor en ceste vie   Saint ume signefie
> Ki luxure guerpist   E le pechié qu'il fist,
> Al diable le lait   Ki pur ço mal li fait.   (1137–8, 1161–6)

> [He is so-called because   He castrates himself voluntarily . . .
> *Castor* in this life   Signifies a holy man
> Who has abandoned lechery   And the sin he has committed,
> He leaves it to the devil   Who would wrong him on account of it.]

The allegorizations Philippe provides are sometimes conventional, as here, and sometimes his own invention. As with the *Comput*, he relied not on one single Latin source but chose material as it suited him from several authorities. Eventually including material on birds and stones as well as beasts, his work shows that there is just one king over all, and that is God.

  Content like this had already penetrated vernacular culture through the Anglo-Saxon riddles and the remarkable 'physiologus' poems in the Exeter Book, but Philippe's *Bestiaire* is the first reasonably complete bestiary in any vernacular. As such it opened up a rich field of clerical knowledge into which European secular audiences would flock for many centuries to come. Yet, as with Ælfric's biblical translations, neither the *Comput* nor the *Bestiaire* attempts to break with the Latin world from which it emerged; rather, in form and in content both works emphasize their author's Latinity. In the first place, in early manuscripts his poetry appears as verses of twelve syllables with internal rhyme, in look and feel like the leonine hexameters of contemporary Latin writing (modern editors, influenced by a later French tradition, break these

long lines into couplets). Moreover, some manuscripts of the *Bestiaire* and the *Comput* are crammed with apparently authorial Latin glosses.[88] Most intriguingly, the French dedication of the *Bestiaire* is preceded in two early manuscripts by a prologue in Latin hexameters in praise of the queen, who is like Juno in her manner, like Venus in her beauty, and like Minerva in her skill; Ovid could not describe the gifts that the generous hand of Nature bestowed on this royal child.[89] In short, the Adeliza of this prologue is a great deal like the classical images Emma, Edith and Matilda liked to present to the world: the Latin prologue effectively transforms the Lotharingian princess into an Anglo-Saxon queen of the old style.

From its very beginning, then, courtly French literature appears in a complicated, but by no means subordinate, relationship to Anglo-Latin, and it exploits the possibilities of the manuscript page as a site where different languages, audiences and perspectives might be engaged simultaneously. Indeed, a principal part of the structure of both the *Comput* and the *Bestiaire* was the 'figures' and 'peintures' to which Philippe's text frequently refers and for which the scribes have left space, even when they do not provide the pictures themselves. The interleaving of image, gloss and text shows in these works that Philippe was writing books, not poems. The basic materiality of this aesthetic, which presumes that the work will be read from a page amply enriched by illustrations, is a new element in French writing, and it characterizes Adeliza's taste throughout her life. Thus she caused the lost French *Life of King Henry* by David to be made into a large book and its first verse annotated for musical performance.[90] And if C. M. Kaufmann is right in attributing the Shaftesbury Psalter to her patronage, then we have yet another occasion where Adeliza lavished her resources on a text whose greatest distinction would have been a sumptuous programme of innovative illustrations.[91]

One last work attributable to Adeliza's patronage is the *Voyage of St Brendan* by the otherwise unknown Benedeit, a translation of the Latin prose account of the Irish abbot's famous journey to the 'Land of Promise'.[92] Sometimes the *Voyage* is claimed for Matilda II, because one of the five surviving manuscript dedications is to her rather than to Adeliza, but the reasoning usually adduced in support of Matilda's 'original patronage' of

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88 Philippe de Thaon, *Bestiaire*, pp. xcvii–cxiv; Meyer, 'Fragment du *Comput*', p. 71.
89 Philippe de Thaon, *Bestiaire*, pp. ci–cii.
90 Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis*, lines 6491–2.
91 Kaufmann, 'British Library, Lansdowne Ms. 383'.
92 Benedeit, *Anglo-Norman Voyage of Saint Brendan*, ed. Short and Merrilees.

the poem – that it was natural for a woman of Scots extraction to show an interest in an Irish saint – is weak. The Latin source for the *Voyage*, the Hiberno-Latin *Navigatio sancti Brendani*, most likely circulated in Ireland in the ninth century, but the earliest distribution of extant *Navigatio* manuscripts was in Adeliza's native Lotharingia and along the Rhine, and there is no evidence of any early Scots (or for that matter English or British) interest in the text.[93] Of the two queens Adeliza is therefore the more likely to have known the *Navigatio* and desired its translation, and in all complete versions the *Voyage* is presented as her commission:

> Donna Aaliz la reïne . . .
> Salüet tei mil e mil feiz
> Li apostoiles danz Benedeiz.
> Que comandas ço ad enpris
> Secund sun sens e entremis,
> En letre mis e en romanz,
> Eisi cum fud li teons cumanz,
> De saint Brendan le bon abéth. (1, 7–13)

> [Queen Adeliza, my lady . . .
> The apostolic envoy Don Benedeit
> Greets you a thousand and a thousand times.
> He has undertaken what you have commanded
> About Saint Brendan the good abbot,
> As far as his sense allows, and he has worked at it,
> Setting it down in writing and in French,
> Just as you commanded.]

Like Philippe, Benedeit relates the appeal of his work to its written form, and his strange epithet 'Li apostoiles' implies a connection with reformed, papal government. An adventure story dramatizing the difficulties of Christian life through encounters with the wonders of the western ocean, the *Voyage* would have interested different elements within Adeliza's court for different reasons. The major accomplishments of Benedeit are the grandeur of his style and an aestheticism that takes frank pleasure in describing both the extremely beautiful and the fearsomely ugly, including descriptions of sea monsters and precious stones derived from bestiaries and patristic writing. The *Voyage* is the first narrative poem written in the octosyllabic verse typical of French romance, but, in a reversal of the linguistic situation seen

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93 Carney, 'Review'; Selmer (ed.), *Navigatio sancti Brendani*, p. xxviii.

in the skaldic poems, Benedeit's diction draws on Germanic vocabulary, particularly for nautical terms. In this French poem, Irish monks go to sea in Norse and in English.[94]

That Benedeit's fascination with wonders and the grotesque, filtered as it is through the same patristic texts that were fodder for Philippe de Thaon's scientific writing, resonates with the poetics of figures like Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes has been frequently observed. The kinship of such an aesthetic with *The Wonders of the East*, *The Letter of Alexander* and *The Life of St Christopher*, however, has gone largely unnoticed. The *Voyage* creates a link between the educational emphasis of much subsequent Anglo-Norman poetry and the intellectual culture of early Britain and Ireland; tellingly, the circuit passes through the Lotharingian territories long frequented by English and Irish ecclesiastics. Yet the *Voyage* also augurs an association among romance, wonder and the clerical art of writing that was to endure for the rest of the Middle Ages.[95]

In sum, the French textual culture of Henry's court must not be explained by linguistic deficiency on the part of his queens or their households, as though Adeliza needed texts in French simply because she knew no Latin (indeed, Adeliza's entourage later appears to have included the noted Latinist and poet Serlo of Wilton).[96] Still less is it a Norman rejection of English culture; arguably, Adeliza's patronage revived traditions from the time of Wulfstan and Ælfric. Yet her preference for French also reflected the state of affairs in her father's duchy of Lower Lotharingia, whose fluctuating borders included both Dutch- and French-speaking communities (including Saint-Amand-les-Eaux) and where the ruling elite had already begun to adopt the language and customs of their neighbours to the west.[97] Quite possibly, the first notable patroness of French books was as rooted in her youth in the German empire as in her maturity in England.

The new favour granted to French books in the queen's court had repercussions within the widening network of autonomous households that characterized aristocratic life after the Conquest. In baronial houses, episcopal courts, secular colleges and monastic cloisters, literary production boomed after 1100.[98] The *Chanson de Roland* and the *Vie de Saint Alexis* were written down for the first time ever in England around this time, and Old English

94 See Hemming, 'Language and Style'.
95 R. F. Jones, 'Precocity of Anglo-Norman'; Baswell, 'Marvels of Translation'.
96 Rigg, 'Serlo of Wilton'.
97 Milis, 'Linguistic Boundary'.
98 The classic study is Southern, 'Aspects'; from a secular point of view, see Legge, 'Précocité'.

homiletic texts continued to be annotated, copied and adapted.[99] Most of these patrons knew both the court and each other: Robert, earl of Gloucester, who received dedications from both Geoffrey of Monmouth and William of Malmesbury, was Henry I's son and Empress Matilda's ally; at Barking, the abbesses Ælfgifu and Alice were friends of the Norman dynasty and patronized the work of Goscelin of St-Bertin and Osbert of Clare;[100] at Durham, Bishop William of St-Calais and Prior Turgot sponsored Symeon of Durham's oeuvre while they took service in the courts of England and Scotland, respectively;[101] and even the 'Anglo-Saxon' school of Worcester that patronized Coleman's Old English *Life of Wulfstan*, as well as *Hemming's Cartulary* and *John of Worcester's Chronicle*, did so under the authority of Wulfstan II, whose connections to the Anglo-Danish and Anglo-Norman courts we have already noted.

In particular it seems that Constance, the wife of the Lincolnshire landowner Ralph Fitzgilbert, was keeping an eye on the literary tastes of the court when she commissioned twelfth-century Britain's most remarkable synthesis of its many cultural traditions, the *Estoire des Engleis* by Geffrei Gaimar. In this work, finished 1137–41, Gaimar provided a full history of Britain in French verse, from the legendary Trojan origins of the Britons until the death of William Rufus. The poem is notable not only for being the first history written in the French vernacular, but also because Gaimar inserts into his representations of life at court, and especially of the careers of Edgar the Peaceable and William Rufus, elements that would later define the *courtoisie* of Chrétien de Troyes and his followers: bravery, nobility and passionate love.[102]

Like other historical writers in twelfth-century England, Gaimar relied heavily on pre-Conquest models of historical writing, especially in his adaptation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for history after Arthur. For his earlier sections (unfortunately lost), he claims to have used the *Historia regum Britanniae* written for Robert, earl of Gloucester, by the Welsh Marcher iconoclast Geoffrey of Monmouth; Constance herself arranged for Gaimar to receive a copy of the latter by approaching the earl indirectly: 'Si sa dame ne li aidast, / Ja a nul jor ne l'achevast' [6445–6; if Gaimar's lady had not helped him, never would he have finished the work]. Portions of the *Estoire*, however, seem to derive from local legends that circulated in the neighbourhood of the Fitzgilberts' midland estates, especially the celebrated story of Havelok and

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99 Irvine, 'Compilation'.
100 O'Donnell, 'Ladies'.
101 Symeon of Durham, *Libellus de exordio*, pp. lxxvii–xci.
102 Press, 'Precocious Courtesy'.

most of the material relating to the Danes. Norse influence is felt again, but from a different quarter and in a very different style than had been the case with Cnut's court. Thus Gaimar's history is not simply the literature of the Anglo-Saxon elite refashioned for French-speaking aristocrats, as though to satisfy their curiosity;[103] it also documents the desire of noble circles to adapt the international forms of the royal court to local needs and interests.[104] Pointedly, Gaimar compares his poem with David's lost *Life of King Henry* written for Adeliza, which Constance herself had copied and read 'in her chamber'. Yet Gaimar 'tels mil choses en purrad dire / Ke unkes Davit ne fist escrivre, / Ne la reïne de Luvain / N'en tint le livrë en sa main' [6487–90; can say so many thousands of things that never David ever made to be written nor the queen of Louvain ever held a book of in her hand]: it had not taken long for provincial patrons like Constance to rival the courts of Matilda and Adeliza and to propel Anglo-Norman courtly writing in unpredictable directions.

Discussions of the early flowering of French literature in England have typically depended on the views, first, that the conditions for the emergence of French as a written literary language could be sought primarily within a clearly delineated 'Anglo-Norman' world comprising solely West Saxon England and Normandy; and, second, that the phenomenon in question was fundamentally the transition of vernacular literature from an 'oral' medium to a 'written' one. Yet it is clear that Anglo-Norman literary culture emerged from a still more complex cultural space defined by the negotiation of social and artistic influences issuing from the Danelaw, the Welsh Marches, Scotland, the Loire watershed and the Low Countries. Moreover, the 'précocité' of Anglo-Norman poets was not the result of newly literate mentalities, but rather the material adaptation of French literature to the type of presentation that had earlier been reserved for Latin and, in a more limited way, Old English. There is ample evidence to suggest that written French, in some form or another, had been familiar on the continent for some time. The innovation of the 'English' courts of Adeliza and Constance was to integrate this written vernacular, and its cultural associations, within a European culture of the book.

In their search for writing that suited their political, religious and intellectual needs, English patrons and artists looked both within and beyond the traditions of the Anglo-Saxon world. If the literature of the twelfth century looks tremendously different from the literature of Edgar's court, that is

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103 Cf. Short, 'Gaimar'.
104 Bainton, 'Translating the "English Past"'.

because the households of Cnut, Edward the Confessor, Henry I and others had made their courts places of international exchange and cultural innovation. Within the confines of nationalizing literary history, much of the literature of England's long eleventh century would disappear from view, becoming peripheral at best. But within the greater story of European literature, England was a meeting place for Anglo-Saxon, Norman, Scandinavian, Imperial, Flemish and French traditions; not only were the country's courts fully embedded within European literary culture, but they were among that culture's most powerful engines of change.

Chapter 25

Gaelic literature in Ireland and Scotland, 900–1150

THOMAS OWEN CLANCY

Sometime in the second half of the tenth century, the 'chief poet of Ireland', Cinaed ua hArtacáin (d. 975), composed a poem that praised the Scandinavian king of Dublin, Óláfr Sigtryggsson, known to the Gaels as Amlaíb Cuarán. The poem was concerned with a place, Achall, not far from Dublin, a site which, in its placement in the landscape, confronted the Irish royal site of Tara, and which now housed a church dedicated to St Columba.

> Amlaib Átha Cliath cétaig
> rogab rígi i mBeind Etair;
> tallus lúag mo dúane de,
> ech d'echaib ána Aichle.

> [Amlaib of Ath Cliath the hundred-strong,
> who gained the kingship in Bend Etair;
> I bore off from him as price of my song
> a horse of the horses of Achall.][1]

Amlaíb had, of course, earlier in his career been king in Scandinavian York. He was a Christian, having taken baptism at the hands of the English king, Edmund. He would die a pilgrim and penitent on the Hebridean island of Iona, in 980. Cinaed ua hArtacáin's kinsman, Fiachra, was prior of Iona (d. 978); the abbot of Iona, who died the same year as Amlaíb, was Mugrón. He was himself a poet, who had written litanies, devotional poetry and also a praise poem for the Irish king of Tara, an erstwhile ally of Amlaíb Cuarán.[2] This nexus of a Scandinavian king in Dublin and the Hebrides, political and

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1 Gwynn (ed. and trans.), *Metrical Dindsenchas*, vol. I, pp. 52–3. On Cinaed, see John Carey, 'Cináed ua hArtacáin', *ODNB*; Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Cináed ua hArtacáin', p. 87; on Amlaíb/Óláfr, see A. Woolf, 'Amlaíb Cuarán and the Gael'.

2 On this cluster of relationships, see Doherty, 'Vikings in Ireland', esp. pp. 295–305; Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Friend and Foe', esp. pp. 398–401; Bhreathnach, 'Columban Churches'; and Clancy, 'Iona v. Kells'.

literary relationships across the Irish Sea, chief poets and clerical poets, is one we will return to periodically in this chapter exploring the diversity and richness of the literature of Ireland, and to a lesser extent Scotland, during the period 900–1150. It reminds us that, although the bulk of our evidence gravitates towards Ireland and its literary culture, nonetheless individuals and institutions had links of patronage and influence that crossed the Irish Sea, north and south. This chapter will concentrate on literature written in the vernacular of the period, Middle Gaelic (usually referred to as Middle Irish); given the breadth of material in the vernacular at this time, comprehensive coverage of literature in other languages, particularly in Scotland, could not be attempted here.[3] A full survey of work produced by and for individuals living in what are now Ireland and Scotland would need to take in Old Norse skaldic verse for patrons in Orkney and Shetland; Latin poetry by a Dublin bishop; and hagiography in Latin relating to the likes of Queen Margaret of Scotland, as well as diverse Irish saints. This by no means fully encapsulates the generic and linguistic diversity of the period.

Cinaed ua hArtacáin was described on his death in 975 as 'chief poet of Ireland' ('prim-éces Érenn'). This description, and the oeuvre of the poet, are a good place to start to grapple with the Gaelic literary scene and its products during the period in question. In Ireland, it is clear, a distinctive learned class had evolved over the course of the early Middle Ages. It was a learned class that had feet in both ecclesiastical and native tradition; its products catered for both Church and royalty. Legal texts allow us insight into what was at least its self-conception, if not necessarily its practical workings. Differentially privileged grades of poets existed, and long periods of training were envisaged. From a literary standpoint, at least, that training probably embraced both poetic metres and narrative, and much else besides. We have from our period both metrical tracts, outlining and giving examples of vernacular metres both common and rare; and also tale-lists, running to hundreds of titles of stories, categorized by tale type ('conceptions', 'elopements', 'violent deaths', etc.).[4] The highest rank of poet within the system was the *file*, an individual who seems to have been expected to embrace the roles of poet and professor; to

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3 See also Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Literature of Medieval Ireland, 800–1200'; more focused, but important, is Herbert, 'Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries'. For overviews of the Scottish material, see Clancy and Pittock (eds.), *Edinburgh History*; and Clancy, 'Scottish Literature'. For an anthology of poetry, see T. O. Clancy (ed.), *Triumph Tree*, pp. 146–214.

4 Thurneysen, 'Mittelirische Verslehren'; Ó hAodha, 'First Middle Irish Metrical Tract'; Mac Cana, *Learned Tales*; Toner, 'Reconstructing'. On the poets and their learning, see Sims-Williams and Poppe, 'Medieval Irish Literary Theory', pp. 291–300.

know both metrics and *senchas* [lore or history]; to know and be able to tell the tales of the tale-lists.

These elements are well represented in Cinaed ua hArtacáin, whose work also serves to introduce some of the major literary projects of the tenth and eleventh centuries in Ireland. He is described as an *éces*, a term which, with its related abstract noun *éicse*, semantically lives more in the world of scholarship and learning than that of poetry. Cinaed is well known for his poem listing 'The warriors who were in Navan' ('Fianna bátar i nEmain'), and the graves in which they lie; he shows here his expert command of the key cycle of Gaelic literature, that relating to the court of Conchobar of Ulster at Emain Macha (Navan Fort). This is a cycle he elsewhere engages with in a verse retelling of the tale of the death of Conchobar.[5] The majority of his poems, however, may be classed as *dindshenchas*, usually translated as 'the lore of prominent places'. These poems (there are, it should be noted, also prose versions of *dindshenchas*) were produced by an array of fine poets such as Cúan ua Lothcháin, Flann Mainistrech and Eochaid ua Flainn, poets who variously seem to have been prominent in royal courts or in monastic settlements.[6]

Dindshenchas verse may be seen as an exercise in the reclamation of both landscape and historical memory. Some of the poems in praise of places incorporate potted verse histories of those places, from deep prehistory through to contemporary times, touching on the origin myths explaining the names of these places, but also recounting the families and events otherwise associated with them. That we are dealing with something more like antiquarianism than deeply held and long-preserved native tradition is revealed in a series of poems on the royal site of Ailech (Co. Donegal), in which competing explanations of its name and origin myth are given, and the second poem, by the scholar Flann Mainistrech, exudes more than a whiff of the academic *coup de grâce*. He opens a poem which contradicts (no more plausibly, in terms of actual explanation) the other versions with a backhanded compliment: 'Cía triallaid nech aisneis / senchais Ailig eltaig / d'éis Echdach áin, is gait / claidib al-láim Ercail' [Whoever attempts the telling / of the story of Ailech of the herds / after noble Eochaid, it is robbing / the sword from the hand of Hercules].[7] Even a poem such as Cúan ua Lothcháin's rightly famous tour of Tara and its monuments (together with the prose tract to which it is

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5 Stokes, 'On the Deaths of Some Irish Heroes'; Meyer (ed. and trans.), *Death-Tales*, pp. 18–21.
6 See Gwynn (ed. and trans.), *Metrical Dindsenchas*; and Stokes (ed. and trans.), 'Prose Tales'.
7 Gwynn (ed. and trans.), *Metrical Dindsenchas*, vol. IV, pp. 100–1.

closely related) in a sense reinvent and name anew the landscape and its traditions, as much as they curate them.[8]

We do well to place these compositions within a much wider context of the evolution and exposition of *senchas* during our period.[9] The tenth and eleventh centuries saw an extraordinary effort among Irish scholars and poets to bring together biblical, classical, European and native historical chronology. The results can be seen in a number of different types of production, which must in fact be interrelated. One is the run of historical poems, which list and synchronize reign-lengths and events local and exotic, as well as occasionally recounting snippets of tradition in relation to the individuals concerned. We could include in this category also versified king-lists, arranged often by province, but also extending to, for instance, the kings of Scotland in a late eleventh-century poem *A eolcha Alban uile* [*Oh All You Scholars of Scotland*], often called *Duan Albanach* [*The Scottish Poem*] but, as Mark Zumbuhl has shown, more likely composed in Ireland.[10] What this instance indicates, however, is that these scholars saw the project as explaining the whole history of the Gael, both in Ireland and in Scotland, and contemporary chronicle obits of kings and clerics suggest that this notion of a wider Gaelic world was part of the thinking of the learned classes. A further Scottish contribution to the enterprise seems to be the Gaelic version of the *Historia Brittonum* known as the *Lebor Bretnach*, probably composed in eastern Scotland in the middle of the eleventh century.[11] In manuscript transmission it is found alongside a version of the Pictish king-list (including the foundation legend for the eastern Scottish monastery of Abernethy) and a Middle Gaelic translation of part of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*; taken together, and transmitted to scholars in Ireland, these items may be said to represent an attempt to gather together the materials necessary for full understanding of Insular history in the vernacular.[12]

Behind and alongside these more literary products (though they are hardly great literature) lies a vast skein of prose genealogies and king-lists, the data sets from which were built (and perhaps into which fed) the poems of folk like Flann Mainistrech, Gilla Coemáin mac Gilla-Samthainne and

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8 *Ibid.*, pp. 14–27; Stokes (ed. and trans.), 'Prose Tales', pp. 280–9. See also Bhreathnach, 'Topography of Tara'.

9 On what follows, see Byrne, '*Senchas*'; Toner, 'Authority'; and P. J. Smith, 'Early Irish Historical Verse'.

10 Zumbuhl, 'Contextualising'; for the poem itself, see Jackson (ed.), 'Poem *A eolcha Alban uile*', and 'Duan Albanach'.

11 Van Hamel (ed.), *Lebor Bretnach*; Clancy, 'Scotland'.

12 Clancy, 'Scotland', pp. 99–102, 105–7.

others.[13] This project of collection, curation and recreation lasted well into the twelfth century. One of its most extraordinary, and historically vital, products was the *Ban-shenchas*, or 'Lore of women', which, inter alia, allows us to glimpse the marriage alliances and kinship relationships among the dynasties of Ireland and Scotland in all their complexity, especially for the more reliable central medieval period. The *Ban-shenchas* was given a verse version in 1147 by Gilla Mo Dutu ua Casaide, a cleric belonging to the monastery of Devenish.[14]

Various of the 'world history' poems also show a clear awareness of classical history, that is, of the events relating to Troy, Alexander the Great, the history of Rome and the like. This awareness should be placed in the context of Gaelic translation of classical epic and history, which seems to begin in earnest in the tenth century, with translations of the history of Troy attributed to Darius Phrygius (*Togail Troí*) and the history of Alexander, and proceeding through into the twelfth century and beyond with versions of the *Aeneid*, of Lucan's *Bellum civile* and of various texts of Statius, such as the *Thebaid*. Recent work has seen the contents and structures of these texts, as well as the wider European literary critical tradition which accompanied them, as being influential in the construction of some of the major native narrative texts in prose of the Middle Irish period.[15] Nonetheless, it may be that the motivation for the translation of these texts was not primarily literary, but was also concerned with the overall project of understanding world history.

We might also wish to consider as part of this effort of historical production the copying, continuing and augmentation of Irish annals, which can be assigned to a number of monastic houses in Ireland during this period, and which show the same propensity for incorporating material received from outwith Ireland, in particular from European chronicles. During our period, as well, the earlier sections of the major chronicles seem to have undergone updating and augmentation of their 'prehistoric' sections, aligning them with the growing database of the historical memory of the Gael. As Nicholas Evans has recently noted, these processes 'reflect an attempt to make imperial and Irish history parallel, and probably promote the concept of a kingship of all

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13 For some of the poems of Gilla Coemáin, see P. J. Smith (ed. and trans.), *Three Historical Poems*.

14 Dobbs (ed.), 'Ban-Shenchus'; Murray, 'Gilla Mo Dutu Úa Caiside'. On the historical importance of this text, see, e.g., Connon, 'Banshenchas'; and Candon, 'Power, Politics and Polygamy'.

15 Miles, *Heroic Saga*, esp. pp. 51–94; see also J. R. Harris, *Adaptations of Roman Epic*; and Murray (ed. and trans.), *Translations from Classical Literature*.

Ireland, by claiming a status for kings of Ireland comparable to some extent with the Roman emperors of world history'.[16] It is worth emphasizing the scholarly and historical enterprise, as I have been doing here, because it underlines a way in which the reality of literary culture in the Gaelic world was not, as so often conceived in general scholarship, one rooted in a fey and evanescent tradition of magic and heroism, but one which was being grounded in a serious scholarly enterprise, one which had intellectual and political roots and rationale.

That is particularly necessary in turning to the most impressive product of this school of *senchas*, the evolved series of texts that travel under the name of *Lebor Gabála Érenn* [*The Book of the Conquest of Ireland*]. Often seen as the keystone of the 'Mythological Cycle', it takes on its real importance when seen from the point of view of history and genealogy. It recounts what we might consider the prehistory of Ireland, taking the form of a series of interventions on the island, going back to the time before the biblical flood.[17] The scheme has been sensitively explored by John Carey, who has described the way in which the successive conquests of the island incrementally write aspects of both landscape and human history on it.[18] Emerging from the narrative is a theme of opposition and conflict between sequential invaders and the rather mysterious people called the Fomoire [Fomorians]. Conquest yields to conquest, until the penultimate conquest by the Tuatha Dé Danann, usually interpreted as the pre-Christian gods and goddesses of the Gaels. The final conquest occurs when the sons of Míl Espaine, descendants themselves of the apical eponyms Goídel Glas (whence the Gaels) and Scota, daughter of Pharaoh (whence the *Scoti*), defeat the Tuatha Dé Danann and divide the land with them, the Tuatha Dé disappearing underground, an occurrence which explains their persistent reappearance in tales of pre-Christian kings and heroes, emerging into the events of human history from the *síde* ('fairy mounds' is probably still the best term), or sometimes from the sea or from inland lochs.

This account is the work of centuries. We already have evidence of aspects of this historical understanding of Ireland's past in the ninth-century Latin text produced in Wales, *Historia Brittonum*, and *Lebor Gabála* underwent a series of recensions. The final product is, like many larger Gaelic texts

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16 N. Evans, *The Present and the Past*, pp. 223–4. See also, in general, Mac Niocaill, *Medieval Irish Annals*.

17 Macalister (ed.), *Lebor Gabála Érenn*; Carey, *New Introduction*, and *Irish National Origin-Legend*.

18 Carey, 'Native Elements', and '*Lebor Gabála*'; and see also works in previous note.

of the period, a prosimetric production,[19] and incorporates and draws from historical poetry produced during the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries by scholars such as those we have already met (e.g., Flann Mainistrech, Eochaid ua Flainn), and their earlier precursors, such as Mael Mura Othna, whose poem of *c*. 870, *Can a mbunadas na nGaedel* [*Whence Did the Gaels Originate*] laid down the basic doctrines of the tradition of the ancestry of the Gaels.[20] The version of *Lebor Gabála* contained in the twelfth-century manuscript the Book of Leinster (which will be discussed later in this chapter) shows its allegiances to the historical project by its appendage of two tracts on the pre-Christian and then the Christian kings of Ireland, taking the whole production down to the contemporary 'high king' of Ireland, Ruaidrí ua Conchobair (r. 1166–98; king of Connacht from 1156).[21] This project was thus highly relevant to contemporary political affairs (the map of kings and their genealogical kinships allowed one to understand, and also to allegorize in narratives, contemporary political relationships against a deep historical and prehistorical backdrop). As important, however, was the way in which it built a bridge between the Gaelic past and world history, creating 'a national myth which sought to put Ireland on the same footing as Ireland and Rome';[22] it meant 'for Irish tradition what the Troy-Legend means for the rest of Europe'.[23]

One might give this immense project a tighter contextual focus by considering the way in which the poet Cúán ua Lothcháin brought his awareness of history, poetry and contemporary politics together with his interest in the landscapes of the past. Alongside his 'tour' of the ancient monuments of the royal site of Tara, we should put his very different poem on another royal site, that of Tailtiu (now Teltown, Co. Meath), which we are aware of as the site of a fair or assembly (*óenach*) held by kings of Tara to celebrate, or perhaps to underline their possession of, that title over the other kings of Ireland.[24] Cúán takes the founding of Tailtiu and its assembly back to the funeral games held for the eponymous Tailtiu, daughter of a king of the Fir Bolg, one of the mythical races of conquerors of Ireland in prehistory.[25] When she dies – from the strain of creating meadowland from a great wood by felling it with her axe – she declares that ever after on 1 August an assembly should be held in her

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19 On this form in Gaelic literature, see Mac Cana, 'Prosimetrum'.
20 The poem is found in Best *et al.* (eds.), *Book of Leinster*, vol. III, pp. 516–23.
21 Schlüter, *History or Fable*, pp. 40–4.
22 Carey, *Irish National Origin-Legend*, p. 1.
23 Schlüter, *History or Fable*, p. 36.
24 Binchy, 'Fair of Tailtiu'.
25 Gwynn (ed. and trans.), *Metrical Dindshenchas*, vol. IV, pp. 146–63.

honour. Cúan then brings the history of these assemblies down through the pre-Christian past, ringing the chimes of the historical synchronisms he and his contemporaries were creating, and takes it also into the Christian past and present. The assembly was held, he says, 'by the Fir Bolg . . . by the Tuatha Dé Danann, / by the sons of Míl thereafter, / down to Patrick after the first coming of the Faith'. Patrick pronounces what seems to be a benediction on the pagan tradition, saying 'Victorious was the proud law of nature; / though it was not made in obedience to God, / the Lord was magnifying it.'[26] Patrick goes on to pronounce curses and taboos on those who attend the fair; and Cúan lists the saints who guard Tailtiu for posterity. In a riveting ending, he then brings the chronology forward 500 years up to the recent present, and the disruption and abandonment of the assembly in the mid-tenth century (we know of this from Irish chronicles also), until Cúan's patron and hero, the king Maelsechlainn mac Domnaill, who ruled Meath from 975, and was king of Tara from 1014, came to revive it: 'The King of Tara . . . Maelsechlainn of sure Slemun, / like the River Euphrates rises on high / the singular champion of Europe'; Cúan calls him further 'the glory of the western world'.[27] The poem is, in some ways, the epitome of the Gaelic scholar-poet's command of a dazzling historical and mythological depth of tradition, alongside an easy familiarity with the wider world of European learning, and of the way in which these individuals were not mere antiquarians, but plugged completely into the political zeitgeist. Another of Cúan's poems, a versified version of (though not necessarily based upon) the prose tale *Echtra mac nEchdach Mugmédoin* [*The Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Mugmédon*], crystallizes the claim of the dynasty of the Uí Néill (to which Maelsechlainn belonged) to the kingship of Tara, and gives us the influential narrative trope of the personification of the sovereignty of Ireland as a 'loathly lady' with whom the rightful king has intercourse, transforming her into a beautiful maiden.[28]

Alongside the scholarly collection of historical tradition, then, these poets, and their anonymous counterparts in the writing of prose *senchas*, were pointing in the direction of deeper political claims. The texts we have so far encountered largely attend to the collection and formulation of tradition. But the period also saw the creation of a great range of narrative texts, in one sense historical, but weighted towards the morals and ethics of kingship and good

26 *Ibid*., pp. 152–3.
27 *Ibid*., pp. 160–1.
28 Joynt (ed.), 'Echtra Mac Echach Mugmedóin'. On Cúan ua Lothcháin and his poetry, see Downey, 'Life and Work', and 'Intertextuality'.

governance, and more overtly literary in technique and style.[29] Such texts could be placed at any juncture of pagan and Christian history; their authors were adept at creating a world suited to its point in the development of Ireland's religion, rarely intruding anachronistic Christian beliefs into the pre-Christian past. Tales set in this past largely see the working out of a sort of divine fatalism, by which unjust acts or unfit kings are undone by the forces of destiny. The outstanding exemplification of this is the tale of *Cath Maige Tuired* [*The Battle of Mag Tuired*], which sees the triumph of the Tuatha Dé Danann, under their war leader Lug, against the oppressive Fomoire; it sets up a compelling series of moral oppositions and contrasting in-tales, all serving as object lessons in good and bad governance.[30] But one might point also to the intricate tale of kingship, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* [*The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel*], in which the boy-king Conaire, partly a descendant of people from the *síd* and so potentially possessed of supernatural justice, commits sequential injustices and sees his reign unfold apocalyptically around him, the whole coming to a blood-spattered end in the siege of the hostel of the title.[31]

Tales set in the Christian past, on the other hand, are more complex, with kings' acts of injustice capable of correction by repentance and the putting right of that which they did wrong, under the watchful eye of God and his saints. A good exemplification of this trend is the *Bórama* [*The Cattle Tribute*], which, though starting in the pre-Christian past, sees its narrative of kingship fused with hagiographical interests, a saint helping to free the Leinstermen from the hated tribute.[32] More fully developed are the kingship narratives included in the Osraige Chronicle, which underlies the text now known as 'The Fragmentary Annals'. These present us with a series of complex Christian kings, none more so than Cormac mac Cuilennáin, who dies fighting a battle he knows is unjust and unnecessary; he is treated as a saint all the same.[33] Clare Downham has recently shown us, too, how depictions of Vikings in this text revise and update views of the Scandinavians, partially taking into account the incorporation of Scandinavians in places like Dublin into the wider Gaelic polity in the tenth and eleventh centuries, but in even

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29 See Wiley (ed.), *Essays*, esp. Wiley's 'Introduction to the Early Irish King Tales'.

30 Gray (ed. and trans.), *Cath Maige Tuired*; see also Gray, 'Myth and Structure (1–24)', '(24–120)', and '(84–93, 120–167)'; Ó Cathasaigh, 'Cath Maige Tuired as Exemplary Myth'; and Carey, 'Myth and Mythography'.

31 Knott (ed.), *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga*; Stokes (ed. and trans.), 'Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel'; for commentary on the tale, see Ó Cathasaigh, 'Semantics of *Síd*', and 'Gat and Díberg'; Eichorn-Mulligan, 'Togail Bruidne da Derga'; and O'Connor, 'Storytelling'.

32 Stokes (ed. and trans.), 'Bórama'; Buttimer, 'Bórama'; on the saints in the text, see Schlüter, *History or Fable*, p. 82.

33 Radner (ed. and trans.), *Fragmentary Annals*, e.g., the 850s, and the entry for 908.

more contemporary mode identifying the 'good' Scandinavians as Danes, echoing the then current imperium of the Danish king of England, Cnut.[34] The capacity of Gaelic narrative to incorporate the 'good pagan' is extended, in such texts, from the Irish pre-Christian past to the recent past and the pagan ancestors of contemporary neighbours of Scandinavian descent. Other texts, however, such as the early twelfth-century *Cogad Gaedel re Gallaib* [*The War of the Gaels against the Vikings*], an extensive narrative glorification of the Munster-based Irish high king Brian Bóruma (d. 1014), could use these same Scandinavians in a more narrowly propagandistic way.[35]

Standing at the fulcrum of this historical balance between pre-Christian and Christian expositions of kingship are the events of the enormous cycle of tales (over sixty in all), the Ulster Cycle, set in the court of its king, Conchobar mac Nessa, whose death is synchronized in the tales about him with the Crucifixion of Christ.[36] Hearing news of that event he is overwhelmed by anger, empathy and belief; the extra brain that had been embedded in his head bursts out, and he is baptized in his own blood – the first of Irish Christians. This washes clean, in essence, the events of his reign, which are depicted as duplicitous and often disastrous; he is a king who, however, seems to command the loyalty of his people no matter how badly he behaves.[37] Cinaed ua hArtacáin rivets this tale to the landscape, addressing his account of Conchobar's death to that calcified brain (a rare case of a tale told in the second person), now a stone kept as a relic in the monastery of Monasterboice.[38]

The centrepiece of the cycle of tales is *Táin Bó Cuailnge* [*The Cattle Raid of Cooley*], which is seen as a benchmark tale by modern commentators and medieval literati alike, because of the way in which its events mark a fulcrum in the story-cycle of Ulster and the rest of Ireland, and also because of the epic and entertaining heroism of its central character, Cú Chulainn. Two recensions of the tale exist from our period;[39] both tell the same story of the invasion

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34 Downham, 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly'.
35 Todd (ed. and trans.), *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*; Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru*. On Scandinavia and Scandinavians in medieval Gaelic literature more generally, see Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Literary Lochlann', and, on Scandinavians as 'good pagans', her 'Pagans and Holy Men'.
36 On Conchobar and the nature of the cycle, see Hillers, 'Heroes of the Ulster Cycle'; Ó Cathasaigh, 'Conchobor'; and Clancy, 'Die Like a Man?'
37 Clancy, 'King, Court and Justice'.
38 Meyer (ed. and trans.), *Death-Tales*, pp. 18–21; see Clancy, 'Lethal Weapon'.
39 O'Rahilly (ed. and trans.), *Táin Bó Cuailnge, Recension 1* and *Book of Leinster Version*. A good, though now slightly dated, introduction remains Mallory (ed.), *Aspects of the Táin*. On Recension 1, see Herbert, 'Reading Recension 1'.

of Ulster by the Connacht rulers Medb and Ailill, assisted by others of the men of Ireland, and more dubiously assisted by a group of exiled Ulstermen, led by Fergus mac Roich. The ostensible *casus belli* is a marvellous bull which Medb is seeking to steal from the Ulstermen. The Ulaid are laid low in their time of need by an age-old curse, which deprives the fighting-age men of their strength, causing them to undergo sympathetic labour pains. To their rescue springs the hero Cú Chulainn, himself under-age and so immune from the Ulstermen's curse. Over a series of set-piece battles he defeats individual Connacht warriors, buying time for the Ulstermen until their debility passes. The tale ends in farce and futility, however, with the sought-after bull torn to pieces by another Ulster bull, and no one ending up the better for the battle.

The earlier recension begins its narrative in magnificent *medias res*, with Medb and her army heading towards Ulster, and confronted sequentially by prophecies and bad omens that hint at the destruction to come. The scenario of the tale is laid out in dialogue, and a prophecy recited by Fedelm, seeress of Connacht, provides our first ominous description of Cú Chulainn. This is ignored, and the invasion is pressed on with. As the weather closes in, the exiled Ulstermen tell tales of the childhood of the warrior Cú Chulainn, whose bloody handiwork they have already encountered, though they have not yet seen him. Our first detailed introduction to our hero, then, is in these flash-backs to his boyhood, with its incredible, almost comic-book heroism: single-handedly besting 150 older boys; tearing out the throat of a vicious guard dog; claiming arms at a very youthful age, despite the prophecy that he would die young. 'Provided I be famous, I am content to be only one day on earth', he says.[40] On the whole, however, the tale is then mired in a series of increasingly similar battle sequences, each one only a shadow of the ultimate individual combat, that between Cú Chulainn and his foster-brother Fer Díad, in which he uses a secret weapon to slay his beloved companion. This has led critics to see the authors/redactors of *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, and other long tales from the period, as lacking the capacity to really handle the 'macro-text', content instead to string together sequences of well or not-so-well realized shorter texts within an overall frame.[41] Whether we agree with this criticism or not, the opening sequence of the first recension, and many of its individual components, show impressive sophistication. As other commentators have pointed out recently, they show as well the intertextual awareness of the

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40 O'Rahilly (ed.), *Táin Bó Cuailnge, Recension 1*, pp. 142–3. On this trope, see Ford, 'Idea of Everlasting Fame'.

41 Tristram, 'Cattle-Raid of Cuailnge', and 'Latin'.

authors/redactors, with constant nods in the direction of previous and later tales within the cycle, and references to alternative versions of the events recounted.[42] The later recension from our period, from the Book of Leinster, which shows a smoother and more integrated approach to the tale as a whole, also shows this sophistication in its innovatory opening. Moving away from the *in medias res* opening of the first recension, it has the king and queen of Connacht talking in bed, a discussion which leads to them counting their possessions in jealous rivalry, a totting up which leaves Medb one bull short of her husband. This version also ends with a much-discussed colophon, in which the tale is referred to at once as *historia* and as *fabula*. This colophon has led in recent years to much intelligent examination of how this tale, and others, fit into medieval models of literary criticism, as derived from classical authors.[43]

If the Ulster Cycle's magnum opus struggles somewhat with its scale, other tales within the cycle achieve greater things with fewer words. The tales which set the scene for the debacle of the *Táin* are some of the best, including *Longes mac n-Uislenn* [*The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu*], which ultimately tells how Fergus and the other Ulster exiles ended up in the enemy's camp, through disaffection at Conchobar's betrayal.[44] This tale revolves, however, around one of Gaelic literature's great tragic heroines, Deirdriu, destined to cause disaster by her beauty, according to the druid who prophesies her birth, but depicted in what seem, to a modern audience at least, to be sympathetic terms by the author as she gradually breaks out of the confines of her early imprisonment and seizes control of her own sexual destiny. As explored by recent critics, it is a tale that trades expertly in the rhetoric of sound and word; the girl Deirdriu, announced to us in inhuman screeching from the womb, learns to be an expert mistress of wordplay and, alone among the men she is surrounded by, fulfils her vow and keeps her word.[45] A similar role is accorded to Cú Chulainn's wife Emer, in another gem of the cycle, the story of the death of Cú Chulainn's son Connlae, at his father's hands. It is Emer, brushed aside by her husband's declaration that he needs no instruction from women, who tells him the truth of what lies in front of him: his own son. With bitter irony he slays his son using a secret

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42 See, e.g., Burnyeat, '*Córugud*'; and Herbert, 'Reading Recension 1', pp. 210–11.
43 See Toner, 'Ulster Cycle'; Schlüter, *History or Fable*, pp. 219–22; O'Neill, 'Latin Colophon'; and Sims-Williams and Poppe, 'Medieval Irish Literary Theory', pp. 302–3.
44 Hull (ed. and trans.), *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*.
45 Dooley, 'Heroic Word'; Tymoczko, 'Animal Imagery'; Herbert, 'Universe of Male and Female'; Buttimer, '*Longes Mac nUislenn*'.

weapon in which he had uniquely received instruction from a woman, the warrior Scáthach.[46]

Two points might be noted about such tales. They create memorable and problematic portraits of female characters, and these have energized much discussion (not all of it terribly helpful). They go beyond the seemingly vilified warrior-queen Medb, and focus upon the capacity of female characters to 'speak truth to power'. These characters join other complex portraits from tales set in the Christian period, such as the conflicted female poet protagonist of *Comrac Liadaine ocus Cuirithir* [*The Meeting of Liadain and Cuirithir*], torn between love for a fellow poet, and her duty to God;[47] or the strange palimpsest speaker of the long monologic poem 'The Lament of the Old Woman/Nun of Beare': ostensibly a nun lonely in her convent cell, the speaker recalls her heady youth, her arms around supple young kings, in terms which evoke a mythical undertow.[48] The second point is the way such tales make their points. The narrators of these tales rarely offer clear explanations of what morals or insights we are to take away from them.[49] Rather, almost in a form of applied biblical exegesis, the narrative is left to do such work by means of its structure and rhetoric. The result – one that can be seen throughout early medieval Gaelic narrative literature (and to some extent poetry) – is a literature that allows, perhaps even demands, its audience to make mature interpretations of cause, effect and meaning.

Perhaps the most studied narrative text of this kind, a tenth-century tale set in seventh-century Leinster, is *Fingal Rónáin* [*Rónán's Kinslaying*].[50] At base it is a tale of an old king who marries too young a queen, who herself then attempts to seduce his son, Mael Fothartaig, leading ultimately to Rónán killing his son through jealousy, at the instigation of the queen. It has a denouement worthy of Hamlet, but the whole tale is a very compressed affair, its energy provided by skilful dialogue and wordplay. Rather than a simple tragedy, it is a 'problem piece', in which a number of aspects of motivation and right and wrong must be weighed up by the audience – much is concealed and in conflict, and words such as 'honour' and 'benefit'

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46 Findon, *Woman's Words*, pp. 84–106.
47 See Clancy, 'Fools and Adultery', pp. 120–3.
48 See Ó hAodha (ed. and trans.), 'Lament of the Old Woman of Beare'; see also Martin, 'Lament'.
49 See Sims-Williams and Poppe, 'Medieval Irish Literary Theory', p. 302; and Ó Cathasaigh, 'Rhetoric of *Fingal Rónáin*'.
50 E.g. (from an extensive bibliography): Ó Cathasaigh, 'Varia III', and 'Rhetoric of *Fingal Rónáin*'; Clancy, 'Fools and Adultery', pp. 118–20; Poppe, 'Deception'; and Boll, 'Seduction'.

are traded in tense and coded ways. Kaarina Hollo has explored the notion that such short pieces represent an 'argumentative space',[51] an idea highly appropriate to literature whose recipients may well have been the residents of courts and monasteries.

So far this chapter has concentrated on secular literature, although much of what has been discussed was probably produced, and was certainly preserved, in ecclesiastical foundations. Despite this, what we have from our period probably represents the largest extant early medieval corpus of vernacular texts relating to secular concerns anywhere in Europe. But these centres also produced more overtly religious literature. Again, but perhaps more remarkable, from our period the bulk of this literature is in the vernacular, whether it be texts on monastic discipline, saints' Lives, devotional poetry or works of the Gaelic Christian imagination, such as tales of otherworld voyages. A figure mentioned at the outset of this chapter exemplifies some of this range. To Mugrón, abbot of Iona from 964 to 980, is attributed a series of compositions, including a litany, a devotional poem in the form of a *lorica* or poem of protection, a poem in praise of St Columba and, alongside these, an elegy on the death in battle of the king of Tara Congalach mac Maíle Mithig in 956.[52] Although all these ascriptions are of uncertain veracity, this range nonetheless suggests that moving religious poetry could be composed by people otherwise entrenched in the dynastic politics of the day, allied to kings and warlords.

That mix of politics and religion is perhaps best seen in some of the hagiographical texts of the period. There are not many saints' Lives which can be clearly dated to the period 900 to 1150, but those there are (with the exception of Turgot's *Life of St Margaret*) carry on a trajectory established earlier in the Middle Ages, whereby saints' Lives became predominantly statements of monastic houses' ambitions in terms of rights, properties, power and privilege. In many of these texts, Christian devotion, and the exemplary character of the holy man, take a back seat, and the narrative is driven by the need to clarify institutional relationships and warn off the enemies of the founder saint's establishments. A good example is *Betha Adomnáin* [*The Life of Adomnán*], composed in the monastery of Kells in the 970s, and partly directed against enemies such as Amlaíb Cuarán, king of Dublin (who sacked Kells in 970), and Domnall, king of Brega, the son of

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51 Hollo, 'Fingal Rónáin'.

52 For most of the corpus, see Clancy (ed.), *Triumph Tree*, pp. 158–63, and sources there cited, p. 334; for the elegy on Congalach, see Flower, *Catalogue*, §66, p. 492; and Clancy, 'Iona v. Kells', pp. 95–6.

Congalach mac Maíle Mithig, mentioned above.[53] In this Life, gone is the learned and humane St Adomnán, author of the *Vita Columbae* and *De locis sanctis*; he is replaced by a miracle-wielding, curse-ready saint, powerful in his protection and far from slow to anger. The extreme of this type of saint may be found in the later *Life of Findchú of Brí-Gobann*, who fights anachronistic Vikings, and scores of his countrymen, with 'sparks of blazing fire [that] burst out of his teeth' in battle. In an extraordinary ending, which cannot help but read as mildly ironic, 'he went to Rome, for he was repentant of the battles which he had fought and the deeds he had done for friendship and for the love of brotherhood'.[54] As noted, this is partisan sanctity at an extreme, and Findchú may perhaps be a foil for contemporary Munster kings, as much as for clerics. Nonetheless, the Life is less odd when read against the backdrop of contemporary annals, in which monasteries were frequently both venue and participant in the dynastic struggles of the age.

The most important of the Middle Irish saints' Lives is that of Patrick, his so-called *Vita tripartita*. This enormous production, written mainly in Gaelic though with some Latin, incorporates and augments material from previous Lives of the saint, and much else besides. In it, Patrick becomes a saint who bestrides Ireland, busy on circuits and constantly bestowing gifts, particularly of relics, on clerics whose churches are then by implication subordinate to his own church at Armagh. It is a highly ambitious project, designed to promote and underline the reputation of Armagh's saint beyond all other Irish saints.[55]

If hagiography was to some extent a religious genre neutralized by ecclesiastical politics, the medieval Gaelic world was nonetheless capable of religious literature of great power. In texts such as *Fís Adomnáin* [*The Vision of Adomnán*] and the striking *In Tenga Bith-Nua* [*The Evernew Tongue*] Irish authors explored the world of eschatology and made striking and original contributions to it.[56] Alongside such works we can see Irish authors translating and adapting: the passions of the early martyrs of the Church, apocryphal texts of all descriptions and, most strikingly, a verse rendition of salvation history, a highly ambitious work completed in the 980s, *Saltair na*

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53 Herbert and Ó Riain (eds. and trans.), *Betha Adamnáin*, pp. 8–20; and see Clancy, 'Iona v. Kells', pp. 96–101.

54 Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Lives of the Saints*, lines 2788–3302; Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 243–4

55 Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Tripartite Life of Patrick*.

56 Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Fís Adamnáin*; Carey (trans.), *King of Mysteries*, pp. 75–96, 261–74; and Carey (ed.), *In Tenga Bithnua*. For more on this aspect of Irish literature, see the work of the De Finibus project at University College Cork, http://definibus.ucc.ie/.

Rann [*The Psalter of the Stanzas*].[57] These works, while usually adapted from earlier texts, often augment with deft touches their originals, as for instance *The Passion of St Christopher*, where we are told that Christopher, being a dog-head, could originally only speak the language of dog-heads, and had trouble making himself understood; or the sympathetic and striking depiction of Eve in *Saltair na Rann*.[58] Many of these texts, dating to the late eleventh century, are found in the fourteenth-century manuscript Leabhar Breac. These homiletic passions there join other sermons in Middle Irish on topics such as the Epiphany, almsgiving and kingship.[59] In this collection, and allied texts, we best see works which can be set in comparison with the large Anglo-Saxon collections of sermons and translated and adapted saints' Lives.

A series of eleventh-century texts also shows their acute awareness of contemporary European trends in theological and philosophical thought. Elizabeth Boyle has recently argued for the innovative and cutting-edge quality of one such text, *Scél na h-Esérgi* [*The Tidings of the Resurrection*]. She shows that the text's author was aware of Neoplatonic thought current on the continent.[60] These trends continued into the twelfth century, with Irish scholars composing works on current theological controversies, such as that over the real presence in the Eucharist. Although Ireland would come to be portrayed as a benighted religious backwater by reformist detractors in the twelfth century, texts such as these, and others demonstrating links to English and continental reform, undermine such views.

The Gaelic Christian imagination was also capable of striking and influential innovations. One genre of narrative from this period that falls into such a category is the voyage tale, or *immrama*. This was not a new development in our period – the Latin *Navigatio sancti Brendani abbatis* and the vernacular *Immram Brain* suggest that voyage tales both ecclesiastical in setting and secular developed in the earlier medieval period. Nonetheless, the fully formed 'classic' voyage tales date in large measure from after 900. The earliest of them, *Immram Curaig Maíle Dúin*, has a prose version from a century earlier, but shortly after 900 it, and another voyage tale, *Immram Snédgusa ocus Mac Riagla*, were given verse versions in a swinging metre. Further prose versions of the latter followed

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57 Stokes (ed.), *Saltair na Rann*; for full text and translation by Greene, consult the online publications of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, School of Celtic Studies, at www.dias.ie.

58 Fraser (ed. and trans.), 'Passion of St. Christopher', pp. 308–9; Greene *et al.* (eds. and trans.), *Irish Adam and Eve Story*.

59 Atkinson (ed.), *Passions and Homilies*; see further Mac Donncha, 'Medieval Irish Homilies'.

60 Boyle, 'Neoplatonic Thought'.

in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and beyond, whilst *Immram Curaig Ua Corra* belongs to the twelfth century. Each places a different set of protagonists out on the open ocean: Mael Dúin, motivated by revenge, Snédgus and MacRiagla, clerics of Columba, motivated by curiosity, and the extraordinary Uí Chorra, children of a pact with the devil, seal their penitence in their journeys on the sea. In each tale, God's mercy is revealed to the protagonists refracted through visions of marvellous and often threatening islands, and the capacity for sinners to be redeemed is emphasized. The tales allow their protagonists to visit a world of almost science-fiction-like oddities: islands with horse-headed inhabitants; islands full of giant ants; a creature who can turn its whole body around inside its skin. *Mael Dúin* is perhaps the most extensive and most concentrated on the wonderful and odd; *Snédgus and Mac Riagla* is more selective; and the *Uí Chorra* has a marine otherworld that is heavily moralistic, showing Irish convergence with (and perhaps contribution to) the evolution of the European idea of purgatory, and displaying a particular emphasis on sabbatarianism. The twelfth-century account of the voyage of Snédgus and Mac Riagla interpolates a full-blown version of the vision of heaven and hell elsewhere attributed to Adomnán.[61] One can see, in this linked skein of texts, narrative ideas which would continue to be influential in European literature long after this period, albeit they were not received directly into European tradition from these texts.

The voyage tales drew on imagery and ideas embedded deep in Gaelic history, law and tradition. The idea of *peregrinatio pro Christo* [pilgrimage for Christ] in particular remained a powerful one. These tales show that, despite changing views and practices with regard to pilgrimage away from Ireland in this period, the notion of leaving behind one's homeland and comfort for a self-imposed exile for God was strong. A poem in the voice of the bishop, king and scholar Cormac mac Cuillenáin (d. 908), and possibly by him, inhabits this viewpoint with particular sensitivity, the king weighing up – and leaving unresolved – a choice between his luxurious royal world and the hard ascetic vocation of exile:

> Shall I go, O King of Mysteries, after my fill of cushions and music, to turn my face on the shore and my back on my native land? . . . Shall I take my little black curragh over the broad-breasted, glorious ocean? O king of the bright kingdom, shall I go of my own choice upon the sea?[62]

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61 On these texts, and literature relating to them, see Clancy, 'Subversion at Sea'.
62 Greene and O'Connor (eds. and trans.), *Golden Treasury*, pp. 151–3; see also P. L. Henry, *Early English and Celtic Lyric*, pp. 54–63, 222–3; for the authorship, see Breatnach (ed. and trans.), '*Amra Senáin*', pp. 20–3.

Whether this poem is by Cormac or not, it exemplifies one of the key features of literature of this period, and one of the great strengths of Gaelic poetry. This is the tendency to inhabit the voice of a literary or historical character and produce dramatic and often emotional monologues in verse. Maria Tymoczko has written acutely of this genre of Gaelic literature, calling it a 'poetry of masks'.[63] I find the image of the mask inappropriate for medieval Ireland, and prefer to think of it as the borrowing of a character's voice or persona. Such poetry was around, without doubt, in the earlier medieval period. It is also a feature of some of the prose texts we have been discussing, which climax in monologues of psychological intensity: these include tales such as *The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu*, with its two long laments by the heroine Deirdriu, and *The Meeting of Liadain and Cuirithir*, with Liadain's final poem exploring her conflict between love of man and love of God. A long late text, probably thirteenth-century and hence later than our period, *Buile Shuibhne* [*The Frenzy of Suibne*], displays the heights of this (re)creation of a character's voice with particular mastery, the character here being the madman Suibne, crouching in rain-wet trees and grazing on brooklime, starting at every noise in the forest.[64] But just as often we are dealing with individual poems which, as preserved in our manuscripts, simply signal the intended character speaking them with a brief title: *Colum Cille cecinit*, for instance. Particular characters that were frequently exploited in this vein include Colum Cille, for instance voicing his sorrow at leaving Ireland behind, or his pleasure at living on an island; and Finn mac Cumaill and his other warriors, the *fianna*, who are particularly associated with poems of nature and place. Such poetry can be very loosely associated with the character speaking, as for instance the poem on the Scottish island of Arran contained in the twelfth-century text *Acallam na Senórach*, which probably originates outside that text and has little to do with Caílte, the character who speaks the poem.[65] But elsewhere, such as in the complex and moving *Aithbe dam-sa bes mara* [*The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare*], the poem itself discharges the speaker's persona. 'I am the nun / old woman of Beare', she says, early on in the poem.[66] One can see such poetry, also, as poets taking on these personae in order to give themselves the freedom to explore big themes that might not be strictly functional for either ecclesiastical or court poet: love, nature, exile and loss, fear of travel, weariness of writing: 'I send my little dripping pen unceasingly over an assemblage

63 Tymoczko, 'Poetry of Masks'.
64 O'Keeffe (ed. and trans.), *Buile Shuibhne*.
65 T. O. Clancy (ed.), *Triumph Tree*, p. 187.
66 Ó hAodha (ed. and trans.), 'Lament of the Old Woman of Beare', pp. 311, 315.

of books of great beauty, to enrich the possessions of the men of art, whence my hand is weary of writing', says one poem ascribed simply to Colum Cille.[67]

What has struck scholars down the years is the comparative lack of functional secular poetry, that poetry which comes to the fore, in terms of preservation and as far we can see composition, in the years after 1150. The literary and linguistic revolution of the second half of the twelfth century saw not just the creation of an engineered literary standard language, Classical Irish, which would dominate production in Ireland and Scotland until the seventeenth century, but also an apparent rise in secular praise poetry, as the patronage base of poetry shifted from the Church to the nobility. It is clear, however, that such poetry had been there throughout the earlier medieval period, though proportionally the remains of it are slight. We rarely get whole poems preserved for us, though there are some elegies. The lament for Congalach mac Maíle Mithig, killed in battle in 956 – attributed to the abbot of Iona, Mugrón, and mentioned above – is one such. More often we get glimpses and fragments, from Middle Irish metrical tracts, or later grammatical tracts. One such tract (*c.* 1113) gives us evidence of such poetry in Scotland even in the twelfth century of King Alexander I;[68] others offer glances of highly polished poetry in intricate metres in praise of many different Irish kings. There have been differing views on this matter. Proinsias Mac Cana argued that the paucity of praise poetry indicated it was not a function of the highest class of poet, the *file*; Liam Breatnach has shown, however, that the *file* was indeed associated, at least in legal texts, with the practice of secular praise.[69] The comparative absence of this poetry may, then, be due to the preferences of scribes rather than the actual production of poets.

As with every medieval literary tradition, our view of it is dependent on what was preserved, and what has survived. This may skew our perspective of the Middle Gaelic period in particular directions, whilst the survival of family-based books of praise poetry to noble kindreds has augmented that genre in the later Middle Ages. It is worth finishing this chapter with a brief consideration of the manuscript evidence. The textual history of Gaelic literature is very different from that of Old English. Unlike the situation in England, Ireland did not undergo a major cultural and linguistic upheaval in the years around 1100. One result of this is that manuscripts produced in the early medieval period continued to be copied, updated and augmented into the later medieval period

67 Murphy (ed. and trans.), *Early Irish Lyrics*, pp. 70–1.
68 Clancy, 'Gaelic Polemic Quatrain'.
69 Mac Cana, 'Praise Poetry'; L. Breatnach, 'Satire'.

and beyond. This means that texts of the early medieval period can often be found in much later manuscripts. Only our (still imperfect) understanding of the linguistic development of Gaelic allows us to confidently place such texts into earlier periods, though occasionally source criticism can also be an aid. It is in a variety of manuscripts, some very vast, of the late medieval and early modern period that the bulk of the literature surveyed here is preserved.

There are five key exceptions. Three major manuscripts dating from the late eleventh and twelfth centuries contain among them a very significant collection of the literature of the period 900–1150 and earlier. These have already been discussed briefly in Chapter 4: they are *Lebor na hUidre*, the Book of Leinster and Rawlinson B.502. The first two of these have begun to attract the attention of scholars interested in the intertextual world of such manuscript collections. The most extensive study to date is Dagmar Schlüter's work on the Book of Leinster, which sees it as a 'document of cultural memory', exploring the way in which the texts intersect with each other and corporately curate and augment twelfth-century views, particularly local views within Leinster and more specifically the Leinster kingdom of the Loígis, of Ireland's past and present condition.[70] The Book of Leinster is a vast codex, and its contents rehearse many of the genres explored in the chapter and more: Ulster Cycle tales, classical translations, *dindshenchas* in verse and prose, king-lists and genealogies, martyrologies and anecdotes of saints, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, the *Bórama*, and much more. Rawlinson B.502 is similar in its scope and content. *Lebor na hUidre*, at least as we have it, is a much more compact affair, but equally diverse in content. As Máire Ní Mhaonaigh notes above, this eleventh-century manuscript preserves the contents of the probably seventh-century, though perhaps tenth-century, manuscript *Cín Dromma Snechta*, some of the earliest vernacular prose literature in Ireland. This material is joined by many other texts, some belonging to our period: Ulster Cycle texts, voyage tales, apocrypha and eschatological texts, mythological and kingship tales. The ways in which the tales relate to each other have begun to be explored in a manner that allows for the seamless flow of ideas and traditions between Christian and native spheres within the hands of what some of the scribes of the manuscript appear to be: the descendants of professional scholarly families, steeped in vernacular literary tradition and open to wider European literary and religious discourse.[71]

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70 Schlüter, *History or Fable, passim*.
71 Herbert, 'Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries'; McKenna, 'Angels and Demons'; Toner, 'Scribe and Text'.

These are not the only major manuscripts from our period, however. It is worth mentioning one further pair of manuscripts, which represent two versions of the same underlying set of texts, that go under the name of the Irish Liber Hymnorum. These late eleventh- or early twelfth-century manuscripts contain hymns and prayers (and some miscellaneous material also) in both Latin and Irish, mostly purporting to be of native Irish composition (one or two of the prefaces give locations of composition in what is now Scotland, such as the hymn *Parce Domine*, supposedly composed at Whithorn). The collection is highly important, showing compositions stretching possibly from around 600 up to the late eleventh century, as they contain one work by the reasonably prolific poet Mael Ísu ua Brolcháin (d. 1086), a hymn to the Holy Spirit.[72] There are hymns here on many saints – Patrick, Brigit and Columba chief among them, but also Martin, the archangel Michael, and others. These hymns are usually preceded by some form of preface, usually in the form of an *accessus* prologue, giving *locus*, *tempus*, *persona* and *causa scribendi*, often in a mixture of Gaelic and Latin. These prologues show medieval exegetical tools at work on native literature in both Gaelic and Latin, and allow us some sense of the self-awareness of the Irish literati who composed not just these works but also the other types of text we have been discussing. In among these prologues, too, we get little bits of marginalia and illustrative poems and fragments, and some of these are treasured pieces. They include, for instance, some of the earliest references to the legends of Finn mac Cumaill in manuscript: a poem on the coming of winter which is a marvel of linguistic compression, meant to be spoken by Finn himself; and a poem in the voice of the tragic heroine Grainne, speaking to Finn (presumably about her lover Diarmait): 'Fil duine / frismad buide lemm díuterc, / día tibrinn in m-bith m-buide, / h-uile h-uile, cid díupert' [There's a man / on whom I'd gladly gaze, / for whom I'd give the golden world, / all, all, though it were a fraud].[73] Even in the midst of learning and devotion, these strong shoots of the narrative and poetic tradition burst through.

And these fragments remind us too of the hidden world behind our texts. As with most medieval cultures, the majority of 'literary' activity, the

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72 Herbert provides an insightful study of the methods of the Liber Hymnorum compilers in 'Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries'; for a study and edition of all Mael Ísu's poetry, see Ní Bhrolcháin (ed.), *Maol Iosa Ó Brolcháin*.

73 Murphy (ed. and trans.), *Early Irish Lyrics*, pp. 160–1. This chapter unfortunately has no space to explore the evolution of the legend of Finn, and the genre called *fiannaigecht*, which is a major feature of Gaelic literature after our period, but has strong roots in the period before 1150. For an overview of the subject, see Arbuthnot and Parsons (eds.), *Gaelic Finn Tradition*.

composition, performance and reception of poetry and tales, must have been predominantly oral and aural. For every tale or poem written on those pages of vellum that have been preserved, there may have been hundreds of others, and indeed versions of what we do have, that are lost to us. That context, and the vitality of the spoken tradition, are given life in a *dindshenchas* poem on the assembly or fair of Carman, Co. Wexford, found uniquely in the Book of Leinster.[74] At that fair, we are told, a great variety of entertainments is on offer. What the poem recounts is a virtual summary of all the genres and texts we have been treating in this chapter. Indeed, in an extraordinary intertextual feat, it is a summary of the many texts contained alongside this poem in the Book of Leinster. This poses us the question of whether we are getting a sense of the real activities of such a fair, or a meta-literary simulacrum. It is nonetheless a fitting conspectus of the Gaelic literary scene, 900–1150, on which to close:

Is iat a ada olla / stuic, cruitti, cuirn chróes-tholla, / cúisig, timpaig cen tríamna, / filid, ocus fáen-chlíara.

Fian-shruth Find, fáth cen dochta, / togla, tána, tochmorca, / slisnige, is dúle feda, / áera, rúne romera.

Ároisc roscada ríagail, / 's tecusca fíra Fithail, / dubláidi dindshenchais dait, / tecusca Cairpri is Chormaic.

Na fessa im fheis truim Temra, / óenaige im óenach Emna, / annálad and, is fír so, / cach rand rorannad Héreo.

Scél tellaig Temra, nach timm, / fis cech trichat in hÉrind, / banshenchas, buidne, bága, / bruidne, gessi, gabála . . .

Pípai, fidli, fir cengail, / cnámfhir ocus cuslennaig, / sluag étig engach égair, / béccaig ocus búridaig.

Turcbait a fedma uile / do ríg Berba bruthmaire: / conérne in rí rán fri mess / ar cach dán a míad díles.

These are the Fair's great privileges: / trumpets, harps, hollow-throated horns, / pipers, timpanists unwearied, / poets and meek musicians.

Tales of Find and the Fianna, a matter inexhaustible, / sack[ing]s, forays, wooings, / tablets, and books of lore, / satires, keen riddles:

Proverbs, maxims, the Rule / and truthful teachings of Fithal, / dark lays of the Dindsenchas for [you], / teachings of Cairpre and Cormac;

74 Gwynn (ed. and trans.), *Metrical Dindshenchas*, vol. III, pp. 18–21; Schlüter, *History or Fable*, pp. 163–4.

The feasts round the mighty Feast of Tara, / the fairs, round the Fair of Emain; / annals there, this is true; / every division into which Erin has been divided:

The tale of the household of Tara, that is not scanty, / the knowledge of every [district] in Erin, / the chronicle of women, tales of armies, conflicts, / hostels, tabus, captures . . .

Pipes, fiddles, gleemen, / bones-players and bag-pipers, / a crowd hideous, noisy, profane, / shriekers and shouters.

They exert all their efforts / for the king of seething Berba: / the king, noble and honoured, / pays for each art its proper honour.

Chapter 26

Writing in Welsh to 1150: (re)creating the past, shaping the future

SIONED DAVIES

Arthur, Merlin, Taliesin – these are just three of the enigmatic characters that emerge out of the earliest writing in Welsh.[1] The period up to 1150 is witness to a wide range of literary texts in the language, reflecting a dynamic and vigorous culture that existed within a multi-ethnic, multilingual environment, with one caveat, however: no literary manuscript in the Welsh language itself predates the mid-thirteenth century. Indeed, no books in Latin or the vernacular have survived from Wales before the eighth century, and from the period between the eighth and the twelfth centuries no more than twenty books or fragments have survived.[2] These are mainly ecclesiastical and theological works such as the eighth-century Gospel book of St Chad (which was acquired in exchange for 'a very good horse'), held at Lichfield Cathedral in England for over a thousand years but formerly at Llandeilo Fawr in Wales; patristic works, classical and Christian school texts, and pseudo-historical works such as the *Historia Brittonum* – the language of literacy was, in the main, Latin, not Welsh.

Traditionally, Welsh is treated as a separate language from the mid-sixth century, emerging from the Brythonic language which was spoken over almost all of Britain. Our earliest records of written Welsh are found in inscriptions, the earliest of all being the Tywyn inscribed stone of the early ninth century.[3] The earliest Welsh in a book is the 'Surexit' memorandum of the same period, found in the marginalia of the St Chad Gospel mentioned above,[4] while two poems preserved as marginal notes (added in the late ninth or early tenth century) in the Juvencus manuscript (Cambridge, University

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1 Thanks are due to my colleague Dr Dylan Foster Evans for his helpful comments and suggestions.
2 Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, pp. 1–3. See www.llgc.org.uk for digitized versions of medieval Welsh manuscripts.
3 See Sims-Williams, *Studies on Celtic Languages*, pp. 184–5.
4 Jenkins and Owen, 'Welsh Marginalia, Part I' and 'Part II'.

Library, Ff.4.42) are the earliest surviving poetry in the Welsh language. Another manuscript, Cambridge University Library, MS, Add. 454, dated to the late ninth or early tenth century, contains a computus fragment which discusses methods of recording the courses of the moon – this is the earliest example of a treatise in Welsh. All this suggests that Wales was indeed part of a wider European culture and was in no way isolated on the western fringes of the British Isles. But these important early sources are discussed by Ní Mhaonaigh in Chapter 4 above, so the focus here will be on extended writing – on both poetry and prose – written in the Welsh language prior to 1150. Such a challenge, clearly, is not without its problems.

This chapter could, indeed, prove to be the briefest in the volume since no *extensive* piece of writing exists *in the Welsh language* prior to 1150: the earliest manuscripts to contain Welsh prose and poetry are later by a hundred years or so. The dearth of manuscripts in this early period is due to the influence of oral culture, according to some, a view favoured by eighteenth-century Romantics and indeed by many Celtic scholars even today. Others argue that the written sources disappeared at the hands of various raiders and conquerors, and at the hands of the Welsh themselves, for example during the rising of Owain Glyndŵr at the beginning of the fifteenth century, or in the sixteenth century when reformers destroyed Welsh monastic and cathedral libraries.[5] Despite a lack of hard evidence, there is no reason to suppose that books in Welsh did *not* exist before the twelfth century. Gerald of Wales refers to 'manuscripts' on genealogy owned by the bards, 'which were, of course, written in Welsh';[6] Geoffrey of Monmouth, writing in 1138, refers to 'a certain very ancient book written in the British language',[7] while the anonymous poem *Edmyg Dinbych* [*In Praise of Tenby*], found in the fourteenth-century Book of Taliesin and dated to the late ninth century, mentions a particular treasure housed at the royal court of Dyfed at Tenby in South Wales:

> Yscriuen Brydein bryder briffwn
> Yn yt wna tonneu eu hymgyffrwn:
> Perheit hyt pell y gell a treidwn!

> [The writing of Britain is the chief object of care,
> Where waves make their [wonted] commotion:
> May it long endure, that cell I used to visit!][8]

5 See Sims-Williams, 'Uses of Writing'.
6 Gerald of Wales, *Journey through Wales*, p. 223.
7 Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, p. 51.
8 Gruffydd, 'Praise of Tenby', pp. 97, 98.

'Prydein' probably refers to the poet's own linguistic community. Furthermore, a close examination of our earliest Welsh texts shows traces of Old Welsh orthography 'together with evidence of errors of copying which can only be explained by postulating misinterpretation of Insular script, pointing in both cases to a written tradition that goes back to the twelfth century if not earlier'.[9] Nevertheless, the earliest *surviving* books written wholly in Welsh appear around the middle of the thirteenth century, including texts of the Law of Hywel Dda [Hywel the Good], versions of *Brut y Brenhinedd* (a Welsh translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*), and the earliest collection of Welsh poetry, namely the Black Book of Carmarthen (National Library of Wales, Peniarth 1).[10] The period between 1250 and 1350, on the other hand, sees the survival of approximately fifty books, making it the most important period for the conservation of Welsh literature. This includes manuscripts such as the White Book of Rhydderch (National Library of Wales, Peniarth 4 and 5) which contains both secular and religious prose, the Book of Aneirin (Cardiff, Central Library, MS 2.81),[11] and anthologies of poetry, such as in the Book of Taliesin (NLW, Peniarth 2) and the Hendregadredd Manuscript (NLW 6680), culminating with the Red Book of Hergest (Oxford, Jesus College, MS 111), a collection of narrative prose (both native and translations), poetry, historical texts, medicine and grammar. It is to books such as these that we must turn to find our earliest examples of literature in the Welsh language: many of the texts are copied from earlier manuscripts, bearing witness to a lively literary culture pre-1150.

Even so, one must approach with caution since the actual dating and chronology of these medieval texts remains an ongoing challenge to Welsh scholars – division into discrete eras is extremely difficult if not impossible. There has always been an obsessive urge to attribute texts to earlier centuries and to prove that Welsh literature can be traced back to time immemorial, that Welsh literature is 'the oldest in Europe'. Much of this stems from the Celtic revival of the nineteenth century when Welsh scholars went out of their way to show the English colonizers that theirs was, indeed, a noble literary heritage, worthy of any Chaucer or Shakespeare. The poetry of Aneirin and Taliesin, for example, became firmly established as part of the

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9 Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, p. 37.
10 For a table of medieval Welsh vernacular manuscripts, see *ibid.*, pp. 57–64.
11 The manuscript was moved from Cardiff Central Library to the National Library of Wales in 2010.

canon and is still confidently dated to the sixth century in anthologies and school textbooks. Recent work in historical linguistics, however, has led to a revision of datings or often to a 'no certain date' viewpoint.[12] As a result, scholars are rethinking issues related to authorship and locus, as well as questions regarding transmission, be it oral or written. With this in mind, when we turn to Welsh writing purportedly from this early period, we see that it reflects a versatility in the use of the vernacular. A wide range of bardic genres is apparent, including elegy, eulogy, prophecy (often attributed to 'fictional' figures from the past and focusing on the return of Welsh sovereignty over Britain), religious works (praise poems to God and the saints together with biblical and doctrinal knowledge), nature and gnomic literature. Saga poetry is sometimes expressed in the three-line stanzaic *englyn* metre through the voice of a persona, much of it in dialogue and related to a narrative background, while other poems tell of characters such as Arthur and the legendary Taliesin who uses verse as a vehicle for displaying his knowledge, including onomastic lore.[13] No narrative epic is found in this early period – narrative tales are confined to prose, the classic example being the tales of the *Mabinogion* with their mythological, Arthurian and pseudo-historical elements. It is still unclear to what extent poets were involved in storytelling; it may have been a secondary bardic function, given much less priority than elegy and eulogy, the predominant domains of the poet. Prose, of course, was also the medium for legal, historical and religious material such as hagiography, while traditional lore was preserved in prose texts such as the Triads of the Island of Britain, a classification of characters, events and facts into triple groups which serves as an invaluable index of past history and legend.[14]

Whereas the identity of many of the praise poets is known, largely due to the fact that a poet would be associated with a particular patron and court, authorship of much of the other material is anonymous. One reason for this may well lie in the oral nature of the period: there was no sense of ownership as such and texts were viewed as part of the collective memory. Indeed, integral to most Welsh writing up to 1150 is the notion of performability.[15] In a culture where very few could read or write, tales and poems would be performed before a listening audience; even when a text was committed to parchment, one can assume that the parchment would become 'interactive' as

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12 See, e.g., Rodway, 'Where, Who, When'.
13 Rowland, 'Genres'.
14 Bromwich (ed.), *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*.
15 S. Davies, 'He was the best teller of tales in the world'.

a general lack of literacy demanded public readings. It could be argued that such performances would increase awareness of belonging to a particular social group, strengthening the coherence and the ideals of particular cohorts: 'A literature meant to serve a sense of community will more readily achieve this by collective occasions on which the group reaffirms its cohesion by hearing this proclaimed to them in public than by private reading by isolated individuals.'[16] (This would also strengthen the notion of a collective memory, since details missing from bare allusions would be filled in by the audience, enabling them 'to unite around a shared experience or knowledge'.[17]) Such occasions would encourage listeners to conform to acceptable models, again something that is promoted by the early poetry in particular, since the main themes of elegy and eulogy are closely related to public perceptions of honour and shame. This chapter will explore the representation of both group cohesion and individual role model, drawing on specific examples from the literature of the period. It will become clear that such concepts were promoted, to a large extent, by '(re)creating the past', but in so doing writers also 'shaped the future' and with it Welsh national identity. This period was indeed a formative and defining one in the literary history of Wales.

Aneirin, Taliesin and the 'Old North'

The content of much early Welsh literature is interwoven with fluctuating political scenarios together with a response to political and social events, to conquest and colonization.[18] The post-Roman era in Wales may be regarded as one of the most significant in the country's history, as it was during this period that Wales began to emerge as a distinct territorial and cultural entity. The land was divided into a number of small, fluid kingdoms, each with its own ruler and each vying for supremacy – there was no dominant hegemonic polity. By the second half of the eighth century, Wales was clearly visible as 'the other': Offa, king of Mercia from 757 to 796, built a huge earthwork stretching for much of the length of the country to demarcate the boundary between Mercia, the dominant Anglo-Saxon kingdom of the time, and the Welsh kingdoms to the west; it still stands today and is known as Offa's Dyke, a lasting symbol of domination. As remarked by the twentieth-century poet Harri Webb:

16 D. H. Green, *Medieval Listening and Reading*, p. 64.
17 Rowland, 'Genres', p. 185.
18 R. R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change*; J. Davies, *History of Wales*; G. H. Jenkins, *Concise History of Wales*.

What Wales needs, and has always lacked most
Is instead of an eastern boundary, an East Coast.[19]

How different the story would have been. However, the threat of a common enemy such as the Anglo-Saxons expanding westwards or the raiding Scandinavians did not force strategic regouping, largely due to the difficulties imposed by physical geography. Certain figures did indeed succeed in consolidating kingdoms and expanding territories: Rhodri Mawr [Rhodri the Great, d. 878] and Hywel Dda [Hywel the Good, d. 950] who developed a policy of co-operation with English kings and attempted to bring the country under one law code. In the eleventh century, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn actually succeeded in dominating the whole of Wales, but his assassination in 1063, by his own people, left the country fragmented once again and wide open to Norman incursions. But despite the lack of any emergence of a common polity, Wales developed an identity of its own, as exemplified by its language, culture, customs and laws. Moreover, the Welsh, as we shall see, had a shared sense of the past, and pride in a common descent from the Britons, the rightful owners of the island of Britain.

During such periods of conflict and violence, it was crucial that the local leader was able to draw on the loyalty of his war-band; he did so in part by promoting his image through the public performances of his court poet. Gildas in the sixth-century *De excidio Britanniae* criticizes this practice of singing 'empty praises' to earthly rulers, complaining that the poets' mouths are 'stuffed with lies and liable to bedew bystanders with their foaming phlegm'.[20] However, such propaganda was crucial if the ruler were to remain in power. Most anthologies and literary histories will claim that the two 'earliest' poets singing in the Welsh language are Taliesin and Aneirin, as evidenced in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*.[21] It has generally been held that Taliesin, regarded by later medieval poets as the founding father of the Welsh poetic tradition, sang to Urien of Rheged and his son Owain at the end of the sixth century, not in Wales itself, ironically, but in the 'Old North', the name given to the Brythonic kingdoms of what is now northern England and southern Scotland, in what has been termed as the 'heroic age', itself a literary construct. This is also the geographical region and historical period associated with the poet Aneirin, who is accredited with the *Gododdin*, a poem of about

19 Webb, *Collected Poems*, p. 308.
20 Gildas, *Ruin of Britain*, p. 34.
21 Nennius, *British History; and The Welsh Annals*, p. 37.

1,000 lines commemorating the three hundred or so men of the land of Gododdin who fell tragically at the Battle of Catraeth.

The major complication vis-à-vis authenticity, however, is that the manuscript copies of the works attributed to both poets – the Book of Taliesin and the Book of Aneirin – are very much later, as noted above. The firm belief by Celtic scholars until fairly recently was that this poetry, together with other northern material, was safeguarded in the British kingdom of Strathclyde following the demise of Rheged and Gododdin in the seventh century, and thence transmitted – orally – to Wales and committed to writing in the ninth or tenth centuries, accepting therefore a purely oral transmission for three centuries or so.[22] Koch, however, via an extremely complex linguistic reconstruction of the 'original' text, claims to find traces of exemplars in Archaic Old Welsh orthography in the poetry associated with Aneirin,[23] and argues that some of the text originates from written material that is pre *c.* 750. This has led to much scholarly debate, with Isaac, among others, strongly disagreeing. He argues, for example, for a date between 1050 and 1150 for one of Taliesin's poems, claiming that although it may not be regarded as a 'window' on sixth-century North British history, nevertheless it is invaluable as it shows how the sixth century 'was viewed and (re) created' in the eleventh or twelfth century.[24] As for the *Gododdin*, Isaac argues that we can claim a tenth-century exemplar, and indeed maybe an earlier text, but how much earlier is at present unknown. He argues very strongly against Koch's notion of the 'sixth century forward' scenario of creation and transmission, and puts forward a compelling argument for the existence of a number of copies and recensions prior to the surviving Book of Aneirin with divergence in lines of transmission rather than Koch's model of discrete lines of transmission lying behind the identifiable sections of the text of the Book of Aneirin.[25]

We have certainly not heard the last word on the authenticity of the poems associated traditionally with Taliesin and Aneirin. For the moment, I would argue that we should remain cautious – the evidence cannot confirm a date of composition earlier than the tenth century. How close these versions might be to any 'original' sixth-century poems is a matter of conjecture, especially if transmission was oral, involving cumulative changes over a long period.

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22 Williams, *Beginnings of Welsh Poetry*; Jackson (trans.), *Gododdin*; Jarman (ed. and trans.), *Y Gododdin*.
23 Koch (ed.), *Gododdin of Aneirin*. For a clear synopsis of this complex theory, see Padel, 'New Study'.
24 Isaac, '*Gweith Gwen Ystrat*', p. 68.
25 Isaac, *Verb*, and 'Readings'.

Indeed, was there ever a sixth-century Aneirin or Taliesin? Or should the poems be attributed to later individuals whose aims were to recreate a glorious past for their compatriots using themes and ideals that would resonate in their own time?[26] After all, the portrayals of the leader and the virtues extolled by both poets are similar to those found in the poetry sung to later Welsh princes, as is the delineation of the finely balanced relationship between the poet and his patron.

Taliesin is portrayed as the archetypal court poet. Twelve poems in the fourteenth-century Book of Taliesin associate him with a specific patron; these are considered the 'historical' poems by many. All twelve are short (thirty lines or so) and are extremely concise. They are not descriptive or narrative but present cameos of the battlefield, often dramatically by means of dialogue. *Cynghanedd* (literally 'harmony'), the name given to the complex system of sound correspondences in Welsh strict-metre poetry, had not yet developed; here we see only alliteration, assonance and internal rhyme. One poem praises Cynan Garwyn, king of Powys (*c.* 580); two address Gwallawg, ruler of Elfed; while nine are in praise of Urien of Rheged and his son Owain. According to the *Historia Brittonum*, Urien fought against Anglo-Saxon kings including Theodric of Bernicia, but was slain by one of his own allies,[27] the theme of betrayal by one's own men having a particular significance for later generations. Taliesin presents us with the ideal lord who is generous at court and ferocious on the battlefield: he is responsible for the well-being of his people and must defend them at all costs. A British victory over the English is described in dramatic terms as Owain and the English leader Fflamddwyn [Flamebearer] challenge each other verbally before Urien interrupts with his battle-cry:

> Dyrchafwn eidoed oduch mynyd.
> Ac am porthwn wyneb oduch emyl.
> A dyrchafwn peleidyr oduch pen gwyr.
> A chyrchwn fflamdwyn yn y luyd.
> A lladwn ac ef ae gyweithyd.
>
> [Let our shield-wall rise on the mountain,
> And let our faces lift over the rim,
> And let our spears, men, be raised high,

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26 For a re-examination of the traditions relating to northern Britain as reflected in texts surviving from the twelfth century and later in Wales, see A. Woolf (ed.), *Beyond the Gododdin*.

27 Sims-Williams, 'Death of Urien'.

> And let us make for Fflamddwyn amidst his war-bands,
> And let us slay him and his comrades.[28]

No vivid description of the battle follows; rather, the style is minimal – we are merely informed that ravens fed on the corpses of the dead; compare the terse 'And after morning's fray, torn flesh' elsewhere.[29] Another poem laments the death of Owain, 'a reaper of foes'; but even in sadness, the poet rejoices that the English have been overcome – 'Asleep is Lloegr's broad war-band / With light upon their eyes' – and promises for a year to 'shape song to their triumph'.[30] These acts must not be forgotten, the deaths must not be in vain. However viewed, the poems reflect on a period of fighting between the British and the English in North Britain and role models are advocated for future generations.

The *Gododdin* is a single poem of about one thousand lines: it is the name of a tribe and also a region in the Old North, centred in Edinburgh. This time the emphasis is on the *comitatus* – the three hundred or so – who fell tragically at the Battle of Catraeth at the hands of a much larger army of English from Deira and Bernicia, described as a 'heathen' and 'mongrel host'.[31] The men of the Gododdin are mounted warriors riding 'swift long-maned steeds';[32] as Jenny Rowland notes, 'if mounted fighting is not credible for this period, it must raise serious doubts about the historicity of the *Gododdin*'.[33] This is not a narrative poem, but a collection of stanzas commemorating sometimes the 'gosgordd', the 'retinue' –

> Gwŷr a aeth Gatraeth, oedd ffraeth eu llu,
> Glasfedd eu hancwyn a gwenwyn fu,
> Trychant trwy beiriant yn catáu,
> A gwedi elwch tawelwch fu . . .

> [Warriors went to Catraeth, their host was swift,
> Fresh mead was their feast, and it was bitter,
> Three hundred fighting under command,
> And after the cry of jubilation there was silence . . .][34]

– and at other times the individual:

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28 Williams (ed.), *Canu Taliesin*, p. 6; J. P. Clancy (trans.), *Medieval Welsh Poems*, p. 43 (this is an extremely useful volume including translations from a wide range of texts).
29 J. P. Clancy (trans.), *Medieval Welsh Poems*, p. 39.
30 *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 43.
31 Jarman (ed. and trans.), *Y Gododdin*, p. 60.
32 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
33 Rowland, 'Warfare and Horses', p. 13. See also Davies and Jones (eds.), *Horse in Celtic Culture*.
34 Jarman (ed. and trans.), *Y Gododdin*, pp. 6–7.

Gŵr a aeth Gatraeth gan ddydd,
Neus goreu o gadau gywilydd.
Wy gwnaethant yn geugant gelorwydd
Â llafnawr llawn annawdd ym medydd.
Goreu hwn cyn cystlwn cerennydd
Ennaint crau ac angau o'i hennydd.
Rhag byddin Ododdin pan fuddydd
Neus goreu dewr bwylliad Neirthiad gwychydd.

[A warrior went to Catraeth with the day,
He made shame of armies.
They made biers inevitable
With blades full of cruelty in the world.
He made, sooner than speak of peace,
A blood-bath and death for his adversary.
When he stood before the army of the Gododdin
Splendid Neirthiad fulfilled a brave intent.][35]

Even so, the emphasis is on the individual as a member of the cohort, ultimately fighting for a common cause. The poem has no chronological structure but is a series of telling cameos: the mead-feast at court prior to the battle; the bloodshed (envisaged as 'the raven's feast' or 'the wolf-feast'); and the aftermath ('How lasting the sorrow and the sadness'). As in the poetry associated with Taliesin, there is a succinctness here, with juxtaposition of ideas and feelings highlighting loss and grief: 'A gwedi elwch tawelwch fu' [And after the cry of jubilation there was silence]; 'Byr eu hoedl, hir eu hoed ar eu carant' [Short were their lives, long their kinsmen's grief for them].[36]

There is no external corroboration for the battle itself, which again raises questions regarding authenticity, and no mention elsewhere of Mynyddog Mwynfawr ([Mynyddog the Wealthy], identified by Ifor Williams and others as lord of Gododdin, who assembled men from the British kingdoms, feasting them in his court at Edinburgh for a year before sending them to battle at Catraeth. Indeed, although the internal references to the feasting prior to battle are many, Koch and Isaac argue that 'mynyddog' is a term for the men of Gododdin rather than a proper name, further evidence, perhaps, of a fictitious battle and of a poem not rooted in the sixth century. All the warriors die, save one, but the political failure is brushed aside and the poet focuses on the individual qualities of those who fell. The emphasis throughout is on the heroes' loyalty and devotion, so much so that they are willing to lay down

35 *Ibid*., pp. 8–9.
36 *Ibid*., pp. 6–7, 36–7.

their lives in defence of their land: prior to battle they accepted mead ('yellow, sweet, ensnaring') and thus had no choice but to sacrifice themselves. The message is clear: it is better to die on the battlefield for the sake of one's honour than to shy away from one's duty. Their memory will live on forever: 'hyd orffen byd edmyg fyddant' [until the end of the world they shall be praised].[37] It is the responsibility of the poet, and also of society itself, to ensure this:

> Tudfwlch Hir ech ei dir a'i drefydd
> Ef lladdai Saeson seithfed dydd.
> Perheyd ei wryd yn wrfydd
> A'i gofain gan ei gain gyweithydd.

> [Tudfwlch Hir from his land and homesteads
> Drove out the Saxons without ceasing.
> His valour will long endure
> And his memory among his fair company.][38]

The defeat is therefore acceptable because of the bravery of the individual; this is the crux of the construct known as the 'heroic ideal'. Again, such a poem would have had its uses in tenth-century Wales, perhaps as a general incitement to battle. Indeed, there is evidence that the *Gododdin* was highly prized as a public recitation, as evidenced by the following passage from the manuscript:

Canu vn canuawc a dal pob awdyl or gododin herwyd breint yng kerd amrysson . . . Noc a dele gwr mynet y emlad heb arveu; ny dele bard mynet e amrysson heb e gerd hon.

[Every verse of the Gododin is worth a whole continuous poem because of its rank in the poetic competition . . . No bard ought to go to the competition without this song any more than a man ought to go to battle without weapons.][39]

Whether this poetry should be viewed as a 'window' on the northern heroic age of the sixth century is, indeed, doubtful. Rather, we see how later generations (re)created the past, imbuing it with ideals and values pertinent to their own time. By looking back to a golden age when the Britons ruled the Old North, and indeed the whole island as we shall see shortly, a national identity was being constructed through historical fiction.

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 58–9.
38 *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.
39 M. E. Owen, 'Hwn yw e Gododin', p. 128.

Saga poetry

Although the *Gododdin* certainly contains something of a heroic ethos, the poems associated with both Aneirin and Taliesin are not out of step with other poetry that we know for sure to have been composed in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, that is, poetry sung to the independent rulers of Wales between the arrival of the Normans (1066) and the collapse of native Welsh rule in 1282.[40] The emphasis is on the stereotypical leader: rulers are praised for prowess in battle, for their courageous leadership, their noble lineage, their generosity and patronage to the poet. There is little doubt that the *raison d'être* of the court poet of this period was to sing the praise of his patron – the *tywysog* [prince], hence the term the 'Poetry of the Princes' – as reflected in the work of poets such as Meilyr Brydydd (*fl. c.* 1137) and Gwalchmai ap Meilyr (*fl. c.* 1132–80). It is evident that the voice of the court poet provides a one-sided view of the world; his scope is limited for he must stand up publicly and promote traditional values – there is little room to criticize or offer an alternative scenario.[41]

Other possible options do emerge, not in the praise poetry but in the ninth- and tenth-century narrative poetry composed in the three-line *englyn* metre and mostly in the form of dramatic dialogues or monologues.[42] Ifor Williams argued that there once existed passages of prose that would have linked together these poetic utterances; however, they were lost, and so we are now left to deduce the prose context.[43] There is very little to substantiate such a theory: an audience may well have been aware of the context, but this is not to say that the *englynion* were formally embedded within a prose narrative. Jarman saw the *englynion* as questioning heroic values and therefore later chronologically than the work attributed to Aneirin and Taliesin.[44] However, as argued convincingly by Rowland, this does not necessarily have to be the case: in the *englynion* the voice is that of a narrator's persona and not that of a public official, giving the poet greater freedom to explore the heroic ethic and the limits of heroism.[45]

This is the theme explored in the poetry associated with Llywarch Hen [Llywarch the Old], a first cousin of the sixth-century Urien Rheged according

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40 Andrews (ed.), *Welsh Court Poems*.
41 Rowland, 'Genres', pp. 202–3.
42 For a detailed discussion, edition and translation of the poems, see Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*.
43 Williams, *Lectures on Early Welsh Poetry*, pp. 28–48.
44 Jarman, 'Heroic Ideal'.
45 Rowland (ed. and trans.), *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, p. 38.

to the genealogies. He is not represented as a historical figure, however; rather, the unknown poet recreates a past in which Llywarch is now located in Wales – probably in the Llan-gors area of Brycheiniog[46] – and is involved in border conflict with the English. He is portrayed as a lonely old man, lamenting his twenty-four sons who have been killed in battle. He holds himself responsible for their deaths for it was he who incited them to war, mocking them for their lack of heroism. He lives to regret his actions and realizes that the heroic ideal of a glorious death in battle has its downside. Indeed, the poignant lament of the old man, a lone survivor, undermines any craving for glory and unending fame:

> Kynn bum kein uaglawc bum hy.
> am kynnwyssit yg kyuyrdy
> powys paradwys gymry.

> Kynn bum kein vaglawc bum eiryan.
> oed kynwaew vym par. oed kynwan
> wyf keuyngrwm. wyf trwm wyf truan.

> [Before my back was bent I was bold.
> I was welcomed in the drinking hall
> of Powys, the paradise of Wales.

> Before my back was bent I was dazzling.
> My spear was the front spear, it was first to strike.
> I am hunch-backed, depressed and wretched.][47]

The distressing present is juxtaposed dramatically with the heroic past, when he was held as a hero, a warrior and a mead-companion. Now, his only companion is his 'little wooden staff' which must listen to his incessant babbling as he compares his own fate with that of the autumn leaf:

> Y deilen honn neus kenniret gwynt.
> gwae hi oe thynghet.
> hi hen eleni y ganet.

> [This leaf, the wind drives it to and fro.
> Woe to it for its fate.
> It is old. This year it was born.][48]

Another series of *englynion* focuses on Heledd, portrayed as a sister to Cynddylan, the historical seventh-century king of Powys whose lands were

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46 Sims-Williams, 'Provenance'.
47 Rowland (ed. and trans.), *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 416, 475.
48 *Ibid.*, pp. 417, 475.

destroyed by Mercia. Again, the poet fictionalizes historical events, presumably to put forward his views regarding suffering and loss. Heledd, like Llywarch, is the sole survivor of warfare and as she gazes at the ruined hall of Powys, at the ravaged land and at the eagles who feast on Cynddylan's corpse, she is overcome by grief and longs for death as the past, once again, is juxtaposed with the desolate present:

> Stauell gyndylan ys tywyll heno
> heb dan heb wely.
> wylaf wers, tawaf wedy.
>
> Stauell gyndylan ys tywyll heno.
> heb dan heb gannwyll.
> namyn duw pwy am dyry pwyll. . . .
>
> Stauell gyndylan ys digarat heno.
> gwedy yr neb pieuat.
> o wi a angheu byrr ym gat . . .
>
> Stauell gyndylan ys tywyll heno.
> heb dan heb gerdeu.
> dygystud deurud dagreu.
>
> [The hall of Cynddylan is dark tonight,
> without a fire, without a bed.
> I will weep for awhile; afterwards I will fall silent.
>
> The hall of Cynddylan is dark tonight,
> without a fire, without a candle.
> Except for God, who will give me sanity? . . .
>
> The hall of Cynddylan is abandoned tonight
> after he who owned it.
> Oh death, why does it leave me behind? . . .
>
> The hall of Cynddylan is dark tonight,
> without a fire, without songs.
> Tears wear away the cheeks.][49]

Note the powerful presence in these stanzas of incremental repetition, a common feature of oral poetry, serving to intensify Heledd's grief in this instance. The use of a female persona is significant too, and has raised questions regarding the gender of the narrator; compare the song incorporated into the Gododdin corpus where a mother sings to her son Dinogad, describing how his father would hunt with hounds, the use of the past tense

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49 *Ibid.*, pp. 431–2, 484–5.

implying that he is no longer alive and so adding a poignancy to what has been termed the earliest of Welsh lullabies.[50]

The image of the desolate hall also features in the group of *englynion* centred on Urien Rheged, patron to Taliesin, where the ruins again conjure up memories of past heroic glories and become symbolic of the fate of the northern Britons. The narrator, namely the Llywarch of the first cycle according to the traditional view, laments not only his lord's death but also his own part in his lord's downfall. He describes himself carrying Urien's severed head from the battlefield, a fine foam of blood on its lips; the speaker's heart is truly broken as he realizes 'penn a borthaf am porthes' [I carry a head which cared for me].[51] As argued convincingly by Rowland,[52] it would seem that he has betrayed his lord, which is in keeping with other traditions that claim Urien was killed in battle by his own allies, although other scholars argue that Urien was decapitated *after* his death, perhaps with a talismanic burial in mind, or to save him from insult.[53] In the series *Celain Urien* [*Urien's Corpse*], this becomes even more evident when the narrator bemoans his own fate as the corpse is buried – 'Gwae vy llaw llad vy arglwyd' [Alas, my hand, for the killing of my lord][54] – and highlights the grief of Efrddyl, who is sister to Urien but also related by marriage to his enemies. The poet thus explores the themes of conflicting loyalties and betrayal as well as the complex role foisted upon married women of the period, who often found themselves in a pivotal role delicately balanced between two kin-groups; compare the role of Branwen in the Second Branch of the Mabinogi.[55] Moreover, as shown by Sims-Williams, the *englynion* offer an interpretation of the loss of British sovereignty in Northumbria which formed part of a much wider discourse regarding the Britons' loss of sovereignty over the island of Britain as a whole, a theme explored in some of the tales of the *Mabinogion*.[56]

The *Mabinogion*

The 'collection' of medieval Welsh prose tales known as the *Mabinogion* (a modern umbrella title, popularized by Lady Charlotte Guest in the nineteenth century) consists of eleven tales found mainly in two manuscripts, the

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50 Jarman (ed. and trans.), *Y Gododdin*, pp. 68–9.
51 Rowland (ed. and trans.), *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 422, 478.
52 *Ibid*., pp. 75–95.
53 Williams, *Beginnings of Welsh Poetry*, p. 143.
54 Rowland (ed. and trans.), *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 422, 479.
55 Davies (trans.), *Mabinogion*, pp. 22–34.
56 Sims-Williams, 'Death of Urien'.

White Book of Rhydderch (N L W, Peniarth 4–5), dated *c.* 1350, and the Red Book of Hergest (Jesus College 111), dated 1382 x *c.* 1410. The term is perhaps a scribal error for *mabinogi*, derived from the Welsh word *mab* meaning 'son, boy'; the general consensus is that its original meaning was 'youth' or 'story of youth', confirmed by the appearance of the term as a translation of the Latin *infantia*, and that finally it meant no more than 'tale' or 'story'.[57] Despite many common themes, the tales were never conceived as an organic group, and are certainly not the work of a single author. Their roots lie in oral tradition, and they presumably evolved over centuries before reaching their final written form: as such, they reflect a collaboration between oral and literary culture, and give us an intriguing insight into the world of the traditional storyteller.[58] Once again, as in the case of much of the early poetry, the dating and chronology of the tales are problematic, and proposed dates that had been long accepted are now being challenged on sound linguistic and orthographical grounds:[59] all we can tentatively say at present is that they were probably written down sometime during the twelfth or thirteenth century, against a background which saw the Welsh struggling to retain their independence in the face of the Anglo-Norman and English conquest. As we have seen, although Wales had not developed into a single kingship, it certainly was developing a shared sense of the past, and pride in a common descent from the Britons. The basic concept of medieval Welsh historiography was that the Welsh were the rightful heirs not only to the Old North but also to the sovereignty of Britain, symbolized by the crown of London; despite invasions by the Romans and the Picts, and despite losing the crown to the English, the Welsh would eventually overcome and a golden age of British rule would be restored. This theme of the loss of Britain can be traced back to the sixth century, to the work of Gildas; it is seen again in the anonymous ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*, and reaches its zenith in the twelfth century, in Geoffrey of Monmouth's highly influential *Historia regum Britanniae* (1138) – all these were works that helped forge the *Mabinogion*.

This clear view of their own past is attested – combined with the notion of a distinct identity – in the tales of *Lludd and Llefelys* and *The Dream of Maxen* as they combine pseudo-historical traditions with folktale motifs. The former tells of the three 'gormes' [plagues or oppressions] that threaten the island of

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57 See Davies (trans.), *Mabinogion*, p. ix; Mac Cana, *Mabinogi*; also www.rhyddiaithga-noloesol.caerdydd.ac.uk for a searchable corpus of medieval Welsh prose from manuscripts dated 1350–1425.

58 S. Davies, 'He was the best teller of tales in the world'.

59 E.g., Rodway, 'Where, Who, When'.

Britain.[60] These are not represented as historical invaders; rather they have been transformed into the realm of folktale and are presented as supernatural oppressors: the Coraniaid, a race of people who are able to hear every word that is spoken; fighting dragons whose screams every May eve cause women to become barren and men to lose their senses; and a powerful magician who can lull the court to sleep. The tale can be read as an alternative rendering of a triad in which the invaders are listed as the Romans, the Picts and the Saxons.[61] Indeed, the episode of the dragons, who are eventually captured and laid to sleep at Dinas Emrys in Snowdonia, is derived from the *Historia Brittonum*, and linked with the development of the red dragon as a symbol of Welsh identity. *The Dream of Maxen*, on the other hand, tells of the historical Magnus Maximus, proclaimed emperor by his troops in Britain in 383, who became an important figure in Welsh historiography. Unlike the Latin chroniclers, however, the native Welsh tradition shows Maxen in a favourable light, a symbol of the relationship between Rome and Wales, and someone from whom medieval Welsh dynasties claim to derive their descent. His quest for the maiden of his dream leads him from Rome to Britain which he invades and defeats before ultimately discovering the maiden in a court at Caernarfon, in Gwynedd, north Wales. The narrative is clearly politically motivated and is not the only example of an author fabricating or manipulating the past to justify the claims of Gwynedd.[62] As a result of returning to the continent to defend his throne, Maxen depletes Britain of her military resources, so leaving the island at the mercy of foreign invaders and marking the beginning of Wales as a nation, according to certain interpretations. Foreign invaders may be kept at bay, of course, by means of talismanic burials, for example at the end of the Second Branch of the Mabinogi where the severed head of Bendigeidfran ('crowned king over this island and invested with the crown of London') is buried in the White Hill in London with its face towards France:

> And that was one of the Three Fortunate Concealments when it was concealed, and one of the Three Unfortunate Disclosures when it was disclosed; for no oppression would ever come across the sea to this island while the head was in that hiding-place.[63]

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60 Sims-Williams, 'Some Functions of Origin Stories'.
61 Bromwich (ed.), *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, pp. 90–102.
62 B. F. Roberts (ed.), *Breudwyt Maxen Wledic*, p. lxxxv.
63 Davies (trans.), *Mabinogion*, p. 34.

The episode is corroborated in *Trioedd Ynys Prydain* [*The Triads of the Island of Britain*], a catalogue of stories and characters listed in groups of three similar episodes or themes, a structure which must have helped storytellers and poets recall the material. However, there the 'oppression' is identified specifically as 'Saxon oppression'.[64] Moreover, a further triad tells how Bendigeidfran's head was disclosed by Arthur 'because it did not seem right to him that this Island should be defended by the strength of anyone, but by his own'.[65]

Arthur, of course, came to play a leading role in the development of Welsh identity, emerging as a great national hero in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* [*History of the Kings of Britain*] of 1138. In the *Mabinogion* tales *How Culhwch Won Olwen* and *Rhonabwy's Dream*, the authors look back to a time when Britain was under the rule of one leader – not Bendigeidfran as in the Second Branch but Arthur. In the former, he is described as 'chief of the kings of this island'; in the latter, he is 'emperor'. *Rhonabwy's Dream* suggests at the outset a pseudo-historical tale in which Madog son of Maredudd, ruler of Powys between 1130 and 1160, sends men to seek out his troublesome brother Iorwerth; but then one of the envoys, Rhonabwy, falls asleep on a yellow ox skin and is granted a vision, not of future events but of the distant Arthurian past. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this tale is that nothing ever really happens – there are digressions and detailed descriptions, but very few actions that lead to any clear outcome. In fact, time runs backwards: Rhonabwy is guided through his dream by Iddawg who has just completed seven years' penance for causing the Battle of Camlan, Arthur's final battle; yet Arthur himself is then introduced, and we are informed that the Battle of Badon has not yet taken place. Indeed, the account of that battle is replaced by a long and perfectly balanced set-piece where Arthur plays *gwyddbwyll*, not against his enemy, which may well have been an acceptable motif, but against one of his own men, Owain son of Urien, patron to Taliesin. When Rhonabwy wakes up to discover that he has slept for three days and three nights, the tale comes to an abrupt end and no commentary whatsoever is offered. The meaning of the dream and its purpose have been interpreted in a variety of ways, much depending on views regarding the date of the tale and on the nature of the satire contained within it.[66] If the tale is a product of Madog's own lifetime, then the satire may have been aimed at contemporaries, even perhaps at Llywelyn ab Iorwerth of Gwynedd

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64 Bromwich (ed.), *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, p. 94.
65 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
66 Lloyd-Morgan, 'Breuddwyd Rhonabwy'.

whose political ambition was to become, like Arthur, a national leader. On the other hand, Arthur himself and all his trappings seem to be mocked, so that the satire may be directed not so much at the past as at stories about the past, and against those who take the Arthurian myth and its values seriously, a significant departure from other 'recreations' of historical events.

Whereas the author of *Rhonabwy's Dream* may well have a cynical view of national leaders and kingship, the author of *How Culhwch Won Olwen* sees Arthur as the model of an over-king, physically strong, decisive, focused, and leader of a band of ferocious warriors. It has been argued that this tale was composed in its present form no earlier than the middle of the twelfth century.[67] Even so, it certainly bears no resemblance to the Arthur of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Rather, the atmosphere is akin to that seen in early Welsh poems such as *Pa gwr yw y porthawr?* [*What Man is the Gatekeeper?*][68] where Arthur and his band of warriors are portrayed as fighting battles against both human and supernatural enemies including witches, cynocephali and Palug's Cat; or *Preiddieu Annwfn* [*The Spoils of Annwfn*] which tells of Arthur undertaking an expedition in his ship Prydwen to Annwfn (the Welsh other-world) to capture a magic cauldron that is 'kindled by the breath of nine maidens'.[69] The action in the prose tale is centred on two classical international themes, the Jealous Stepmother and the Giant's Daughter, while individual episodes are a focus for a myriad of international motifs: grateful animals, magical helpers, horns and hampers of plenty. When the young Culhwch refuses to marry his stepmother's daughter, she puts a curse on him that he will marry no one save Olwen, daughter of Ysbaddaden Bencawr [Ysbaddaden Chief Giant]. At the mere mention of her name, Culhwch falls in love with her, and sets off for Arthur's court to seek help. There he comes face to face with a host of men and women whose names are presented in a flourishing list – some 260 names in all – drawn from a variety of sources, reflecting both historical and legendary characters, and including Gwilenhin of the French, a possible reference to William the Conqueror. Six warriors are enlisted as Culhwch's helpers, and they accompany him to Ysbaddaden's court where they are presented with a list of forty tasks or marvels which Culhwch must obtain before he may win Olwen's hand. Some of these involve the provision of food, drink and entertainment for the wedding feast, while many focus on the hunting of the Twrch Trwyth, a magical

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67 Rodway, 'Date and Authorship'.
68 For a discussion of this and the other Arthurian poems, see Sims-Williams, 'Welsh Arthurian Poems'.
69 Haycock (ed. and trans.), *Legendary Poems*, pp. 433–51.

boar who has between his ears a comb and scissors required by Ysbaddaden to trim his hair for the special occasion. The account of how the tasks are accomplished forms a series of independent episodes in which Arthur, together with warriors such as Cai and Bedwyr, ultimately helps Culhwch win his bride. This unique tale, full of unbounded energy, humour and sheer panache, was without doubt a tale to be performed.[70] However, one could agree with Stephen Knight that beneath the bravado are serious undertones which emphasize the unity of family and war-band as a positive force: 'the text creates . . . a whole range of alarming threats and then provides resolutions to them which both console and confirm the position of the élite who model for the text and support its production'.[71]

Culhwch and Arthur's men encounter giants, witches and magical creatures; Arthur is a proactive figure, leading by example; his court, home to archaic social and legal customs, is at Celli Wig in Cornwall; the atmosphere is one of aggression and heroic machismo. In the *Mabinogion* tales *Peredur Son of Efrog*, *Geraint Son of Erbin* and *The Lady of the Well*,[72] by contrast, his court is relocated at Caerllion on Usk, under the influence of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and Arthur's role is similar to that found in the continental romances – a shadowy, fairly passive figure, who leaves adventure and danger to his knights. There are no clear geographical or political boundaries to his kingdom, and the action takes place in a somewhat unreal, daydream-like world. On the surface, the three tales convey a common theme in that the young hero embarks on a journey and goes in search of adventure; a string of events follow, usually in no particular order – their *raison d'être* is to put the hero to the test. Unlike the parallel French versions of Chrétien de Troyes, the treatment tends to be uncourtly with no interest in the characters' feelings or motives, no authorial asides or comments; rather, the emphasis throughout is on the action, with no attempt whatsoever at psychological digressions. What seems to have occurred, therefore, is that Wales accepted certain themes prevalent in the romance tradition, such as the education of the knight, and moderation between love and military prowess; however, other features were rejected as being too foreign, culminating in three hybrid texts, typical of a postcolonial world.[73]

70 S. Davies, 'Performing *Culhwch ac Olwen*'.
71 Knight, *Arthurian Literature and Society*, p. 34.
72 For an overall survey, see Padel, *Arthur*. For more detailed analysis of individual Arthurian texts, see Bromwich *et al.* (eds.), *Arthur of the Welsh*.
73 Knight, 'Resemblance and Menace'.

Political prophecy

Geoffrey of Monmouth's influence on the development of the Arthurian legend cannot be overestimated; nor can his interpretation of British history, which further contributed to the sense of Welsh national identity. All in all some sixty manuscripts survive containing Welsh renderings of Geoffrey's *Historia regum Britanniae*, dating from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century; indeed *Brut y Brenhinedd*, to give the work its Welsh title, was the most widely copied of all Welsh medieval texts.[74] Geoffrey drew not only on Latin sources but also on Welsh tradition; indeed, he claims that his work is merely a translation 'of a very ancient book in the British language', a statement that can surely not be taken literally. He traces the history of Britain back to its eponymous founder Brutus, of Trojan descent, and narrates the history of the rise and fall of the kings of Britain. Arthur's role is central: he is given a complete life history for the very first time, and although he fails as a leader – or rather is betrayed – there is a veiled suggestion that he may return as we are told how he is mortally wounded at the Battle of Camlan but is taken to the Isle of Avalon to be healed of his wounds. Welsh tradition claims that he has not died and that he is to return, but Geoffrey's account is ambiguous, for political reasons. In *Englynion y Beddau* [*The Stanzas of the Graves*] in the Black Book of Carmarthen, it is claimed:

> Bet y March, bet y Guythyr,
> bet y Gugaun Cletyfrut;
> anoeth bid, bet y Arthur.

> [There is a grave for March, a grave for Gwythur,
> a grave for Gwgawn Red-sword;
> the world's wonder is a grave for Arthur.]

This refers probably to the belief that Arthur was still alive and would one day return to lead the nation and remove the English from this island for ever, so reclaiming sovereignty. The theme certainly resonated with later generations, even into modern times; to many poets and writers of the early twentieth century, Arthur's awakening from a deep sleep symbolized the national revival of the period and the reclaiming of Wales as a political unit.

Arthur was not the first to be portrayed in this role. The tenth-century poem *Armes Prydain Fawr* [*The Great Prophecy of Britain*][75] foresees the return of

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74 B. F. Roberts, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth'.
75 See Isaac, 'Armes Prydein Fawr', which includes a text and translation.

the traditional heroes Cynan (legendary founder of Brittany) and Cadwaladr (a seventh-century ruler of Gwynedd), whose heroic virtues are listed in a resonating passage as the poet exploits the ornament known as *cymeriad geiriol*, the repetition of an opening word or phrase:

> Deu vnben degyn, dwys eu kussyl.
> Deu orsegyn Saesson o pleit Dofyd.
> Deu hael, deu gedawl gwlatwarthegyd.
> Deu diarchar barawt vnffawt, vnffyd.
> Deu erchwynnawc Prydein, mirein luyd.
> Deu arth nys gwna gwarth kyfarth beunyd.

> [Two steadfast rulers, whose counsel is wise.
> Two tramplers on the English in God's name.
> Two generous men, two gift-giving cattle-raiders.
> Two brave, ready men, of one fate, of one faith.
> Two guardians of Britain, splendid armies.
> Two bears, daily battle does not put them to shame.

The warriors, with the spiritual help of David, later to become Wales's patron saint, will lead the Welsh to glory and condemn the English to eternal exile: 'No one will receive them, they have no place on earth.' It has been argued that this anti-English response arose out of dissatisfaction with taxes imposed by Æthelstan, while there may be also a veiled criticism of Hywel Dda and others who supported the policies of the English king in return for being left alone. The poem draws on the Welsh view of history and how the 'heathen foreigners' came to power through treachery – Hors and Hengist tricking Vortigern into giving them land, as told in the *Historia Brittonum*. The world, it is claimed, has been turned upside down and the 'slaves' are now the rulers, whose aim is 'to devastate the land of the Britons, and to set up communities of the English'. The poem is a call to arms: an alliance is called for between the Welsh, the men of Dublin (Norsemen), the Irish of Ireland, Anglesey, Pictland, the men of Cornwall and Strathclyde. The fighting will be furious, the suffering brutal: it is predicted that the English will fall 'like wild cat's fodder':

> Atvi peleitral, dyfal dillyd,
> Nyt arbettwy car corff y gilyd.
> Atui pen gaflaw heb emennyd.
> Atui gwraged gwedw a meirch gweilyd.
> Atui ubein vthyr rac ruthyr ketwyr,
> A lliaws llawamhar kyn gwascar lluyd.
> Kennadeu agheu dychyferwyd
> pan safhwynt galaned wrth eu hennyd.

There will be a blow from a spear, continuous bloodletting:
the kinsman [of ours] will not spare his opponent's body.
There will be heads split open, emptied of brain.
There will be widowed wives and riderless horses.
There will be terrible crying before the onslaught of the attackers,
and many severed hands, before the armies separate.
Messengers will meet death
when the corpses stand so tightly that they stand up against each other.

The poet clearly revels in such graphic images. There is no doubt what-soever as to the eventual outcome: the *Kymry* [Welsh], legitimate owners of Britain, will be victorious, they will regain what is 'rightfully' theirs, and sovereignty will be re-established with the help of the Trinity, David and the saints. As emphasized by Fulton, the poem gives voice to a powerful cultural myth, resonating with later periods: it discusses issues vital to early and later medieval Welsh society, namely leadership, identity and terri-torial rights.[76]

Armes Prydein Fawr is associated with the names of two well-known poet-prophets, Taliesin and Myrddin (the 'Merlin' of later tradition). Indeed, both were used in medieval Wales to give authority to numerous poems proph-esying victory over the English. Taliesin, as we saw at the beginning of the chapter, is credited with being the court poet of Urien Rheged and his son Owain. Whether he was a historical figure or not, over time he developed a new persona and became associated with a tale about the origin of poetic inspiration.[77] The earliest surviving version of *Hanes Taliesin* [*The Story of Taliesin*] is from the sixteenth century, although the tale was included by Charlotte Guest in her translation of the *Mabinogion* in view of its supposed antiquity and its connections with material in the Book of Taliesin.[78] It tells of Gwion Bach accidentally swallowing three drops from the magic cauldron of Ceridwen the witch; he undergoes several metamorphoses before being reincarnated as the poet Taliesin who possesses great learning together with the gift of prophecy. The medieval poems associated with this legendary figure survive in the fourteenth-century Book of Taliesin and were composed probably in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They reveal the poet to be in possession of formidable learning: he boasts of his knowledge of poetry, cosmology, biblical lore, languages, and describes his transformations, his

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76 H. Fulton, 'Tenth-Century Wales'.
77 See Haycock (ed. and trans.), *Legendary Poems*.
78 Ford (ed.), *Ystoria Taliesin*.

exploits, his muse.[79] Prophetic material is introduced at times, the discourse and diction corresponding quite closely to other vaticinatory poems, with a focus on wreaking vengeance on the English, yearning for a deliverer and prayers to God to rid the land of the foreign invaders. It is no wonder that *Armes Prydein Fawr* was included in this anthology. Even so, Myrddin is cited as an authority for the content of the poem. He, like the 'historical' Taliesin, is associated with the Old North: in Welsh poetry he is portrayed as a 'wild man' living in Celyddon Woods after becoming mad at the Battle of Arfderydd, a historical battle dated to *c.* 573. It has been argued that Myrddin has affinities with Lailoken, a prophet in the twelfth-century Latin Life of St Kentigern, and with the Irish Suibhne Geilt.[80] But he is also associated with Caerfyrddin [Carmarthen] in south-west Wales, and may well have been regarded as the eponymous founder of the town.[81] In *Cyfoesi Myrddin a Gwenddydd ei chwaer* [*The Conversation of Myrddin and his Sister Gwenddydd*], Myrddin predicts future rulers of Wales and Britain, while in *Afallennau* [*Apple-Trees*] he foresees 'playing ball' with the heads of the English in true *Armes Prydein* style.

Geoffrey of Monmouth was to hijack the Welsh Myrddin, changing his name to Merlinus and linking him for the first time ever with Arthur: Merlinus is portrayed as a wonder-child who reveals to Vortigern that fighting dragons lie beneath his fortress in Snowdonia, a story that Geoffrey has borrowed from the *Historia Brittonum*, replacing the child Ambrosius (from Glamorgan) with Merlinus (from Caerfyrddin). Later, however, Geoffrey was to publish his *Vita Merlini* (*c.* 1150),[82] a long poem in which he narrates Merlinus' life story, drawing on the traditions found in the Welsh poems and presenting the character as a 'wild man' of the woods. At one point, Merlinus is visited by Telgesinus (Taliesin), who declares that the wounded Arthur was taken to the Island of Apples to be healed and that the time is now ripe for him to return to lead the Britons to victory; Merlinus disagrees and says that he must wait for the coming of Cynan and Cadwaladr who will drive out the enemy 'and the time of Brutus will be back once more'.[83] On the whole, though, the Galfridian prophecy differs from that of the Welsh tradition, since Geoffrey's most popular work, the *Historia*, was aimed at a Norman audience: his purpose was to validate Anglo-Norman kingship rather than to prophesy

79 Haycock (ed. and trans.), *Legendary Poems*; see also Haycock, 'Taliesin's Questions'.
80 Jarman, 'Merlin Legend'.
81 But see Isaac, 'Myrddin', who argues against Jarman's model and suggests that the name Myrddin derives from **moro-donyos* [Man-Demon], a supernatural being who possessed the gift of prophecy.
82 Clarke (ed. and trans.), *Life of Merlin*.
83 *Ibid.*, pp. 104–5.

the return of British sovereignty over the whole island. Even so, it also held an appeal for the Welsh, looking back as it does to an age when the kingdom was unified and the Britons ruled; indeed, it became accepted in Wales as the authoritative account of early British history until the end of the eighteenth century, generating pride in a glorious past and hope for a restored future.

Mythmaking

It is no coincidence that this turbulent period in the history of Wales was one of mythmaking, with the creation of a national and ethnic identity. As Burton L. Mack argues: 'Social formation and mythmaking are group activities that go together, each stimulating the other in a kind of dynamic feedback system. Both speed up when new groups form in times of social disintegration and cultural change.'[84] The mythical accounts that emerged embody important socio-cultural notions and have an authority about them because they are told and retold. No discussion of the period would be complete without a discussion of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi. As in the case of both the sovereignty and the Arthurian myths, they recreate the past and do so in order to present ethical dilemmas relevant to contemporary issues, moral, political and legal: they are codes of good conduct and models for behaviour. The action is located in a pre-Christian Wales, where the main protagonists are resonances of mythological figures such as Lleu, cognate with the Celtic god Lugus, and Rhiannon, whose horse imagery has led her to be equated with Epona, the Celtic horse goddess. Even though medieval audiences were probably unaware of such resonances, the mythological themes make for fascinating stories: journeys to an otherworld paradise where time stands still and where mortals do not age; the cauldron of rebirth which revives dead warriors but takes away their speech; shape-shifting where an unfaithful wife is transformed into an owl, or a pregnant wife into a mouse. Such events are interwoven with well-known themes and motifs from the world of storytelling. Both Rhiannon's and Branwen's penance are variations on the theme of the Calumniated Wife: when her son disappears on the night of his birth, Rhiannon is forced to act like a horse and carry people on her back to court, while Branwen is made to suffer for her half-brother Efnysien's insult to the king of Ireland. A monster hand, a cloak of invisibility, a magic mist – these are all elements that contribute to making the Four Branches some of the best storytelling ever.

84 B. L. Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament?*, p. 203.

But these are more than mere tales of magic and suspense. Despite the absence of a clear, overarching structure, there is within them a thematic unity that gives a consistency to the tales and suggests a single author working with traditional material to put forward a consistent view regarding appropriate social behaviour. In the first three branches, the natures of insult, compensation and friendship are explored, and acts of revenge shown to be totally destructive – legal settlement and hard bargaining are to be preferred. In the Fourth Branch, however, further considerations are raised. Math, lord of Gwynedd, is not only insulted, but also dishonoured as his virgin foot-holder is raped, and his dignity as a person is attacked. The offenders, his own nephews, are transformed into animals – male and female – and are shamed by having offspring from one another. But once their punishment is complete, Math forgives them in the spirit of reconciliation. As noted by Brynley F. Roberts, 'legal justice is necessary for the smooth working of society, but without the graces of forgetting and forgiving, human pride will render the best systems unworkable'.[85] Throughout the Four Branches, therefore, the author conveys a scale of values which he commends to contemporary society, doing so by implication rather than by any direct commentary, and placing his characters in situations where they must make a choice. The listeners witness the results of the choices made, and are invited to judge for themselves, as individuals and as a group, whether the right decision was taken. A close reading of the text shows that most of the decision-making in the Four Branches happens when characters find themselves in a liminal state, physically separated from the rest of society.[86] This is a time of upheaval and disorder; but such disruption can be innovative and lead to regenerative possibilities. In this way, the author sets up a dialogue with the audience, and moral education takes place, the consequences of an action highlighting the ethical validity of any decision.[87] Indeed, many of the questions evoked by the tales are still pertinent today, and continue to inspire writers and poets alike, thus, ironically, reinvesting the *Mabinogi* with that 'sacred' quality that may once have been part of their fabric.

There is no doubt that these tales are indebted to the world of oral story-telling.[88] And even when they were committed to vellum, orality and aurality continued to be a vital component in their transmission, as manuscripts would have been read aloud to a listening audience. In such performance arenas, the

85 B. F. Roberts, *Studies on Middle Welsh Literature*, p. 101.
86 See V. Turner's model of liminality as reflected in, e.g., his *Forest of Symbols*.
87 S. Davies, 'Venerable Relics'.
88 Davies (trans.), *Mabinogion*, pp. xiii–xvii.

social 'usefulness' of not only the Four Branches, but of all the texts discussed in this chapter, becomes apparent:

> By means of such genres as theatre . . . and professional story-telling, performances are presented which probe a community's weaknesses, call its leaders to account, desacralize its most cherished values and beliefs, portray its characteristic conflicts and suggest remedies for them, and generally take stock of its current situation in the known 'world'.[89]

Early medieval Wales was a continually changing world. Even so, traditional social values are reiterated time and time again and acceptable models are redefined: for the individual, as exemplified by Urien, Arthur and the warrior-heroes of the *Gododdin*, or the *Mabinogi*'s Math and Manawydan who may well have acted as a mirror for medieval princes; and for the cohort, whether configured as regional, all-Wales or all-Britain. By (re)creating the past, writers shaped the future through cultural myths that have a lasting resonance. Loss, betrayal, self-destruction are themes that make up this complex web of which an emergent national identity was constructed. Sovereignty over the island of Britain had been lost; the regions of the Old North had been conquered. But with heroes such as Cynan, Cadwaladr and Arthur to call upon, the future was certain. Moreover, these early texts also shaped the literary face of modern-day Wales as they became part of the accepted canon and a reservoir on which poets and writers could draw; although mere 'relics' to many nineteenth-century antiquarians, the mythicized conceptions promoted in our early poetry and prose tales have an ongoing relevance and play a crucial role in the many facets of the modern Welsh identity.

89 V. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 11.

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